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Part One - Blissful Beginnings

[image]

FIRECLAN

Leader

Flamestar - A deep red tom with warm brown eyes. Scar on neck and ripped left ear.

Deputy

Stormwhisker - Dark gray striped tom with blue eyes. Scar on nose ridge.

Medicine Cat

Silverheart - Black tom with silver underbelly and deep blue eyes. Scar on the tail.

Medicine Cat Apprentice

Rosepaw - Brown tabby she-cat with soft brown eyes.

Warriors

Nightfrost - Spotted black and white tom. Torn ears, scratched sides, and has a single blue right eye. Apprentice; Brightpaw.

Whiteflower - Beautiful white she-cat with golden spots and blue eyes.

Mistygaze - Grey she-cat with silver eyes.

Apprentce; Rainpaw

Swanwing - Pretty white she-cat with pale yellow eyes.

Eaglefeather - Brown tom with a white underbelly and yellow eyes.

Stagleap - Handsome brown tom with a white underbelly and white spots on back. Brown eyes.

Cloudstorm - Blue tom with blue eyes.

Apprentice; Lionpaw

Apprentices

Brightpaw - Fearsome long-furred golden tabby with golden eyes. Has overgrown claws and teeth.

Mentor; Nightfrost.

Lionpaw - Pure golden tom with blue eyes.

Mentor; Cloudstorm.

Rainpaw - Longhair silver tabby with striking blue eyes. The tufts on her ears are unusually long.

Mentor; Mistygaze.

Queens

Oakshade - Brown she-cat with strange black eyes. Mother of Shadowkit and Chinesong, and Skykit.

Dovewing - Sweet brown tabby with brown eyes. Mother of Pebblekit.

Willowfog - Longhaired grayish-white she-cat with amber eyes. Mother of Firekit and Icekit.

Elders

None currently.

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WATERCLAN

Leader

Eaglestar - Elderly long-furred black cat with white underbelly, chest, and paws. Green eyes.

Deputy

Tinyspeck - Elderly black she-cat with a bobbed tail and blue eyes.

Medicine Cats

Fireflight - Black she-cat with unusual red splotches and amber eyes.

Apprentices

Crowpaw - Tall, pure black long-furred tom with icy blue eyes.

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FORESTCLAN

Leader

Honeystar - A short, stocky honey-brown tom with greenish-amber

Deputy

Sharpfang - Tall, battle-scarred white tom with green eyes.

Medicine Cats

Fernnose - Brown tom with green eyes.

Bright Stars

[image]

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Whiteflower stood in front of two golden kits. One of the kits had a solid gold pelt and had blue eyes. He was bouncing around the nursery with excitement.

"Lionkit, stay still! You are ruining your fur!" Whiteflower sighed as Lionkit ran around.

"Come here right now, or I'm gonna call Sunstar to get you!" Whiteflower growled, trying to catch her fleeing furball. Another kit was watching him. Her pelt was golden like his, but she had sleek brown-black stripes running along her fur. Black fur sprouted from the tips of her ears like a bobcat. All Fireclan cats have additional tufts on their ears.

She showed no expression, but her eyes glittered with wisdom beyond her age of six moons as if she was already a warrior. Her tail was gracefully wrapped around her paws. Her fur was groomed, but Lionkit's fur was ruffled up. Whiteflower snagged Lionkit by the scruff of his neck and began to lick him again.

"*Mmmooommm!* Sunstar is just some old kit's tale! She isn't real!" Lionkit protested as Whiteflower groomed him.

"Lionkit, you will be a new apprentice today and I want you to look your best. Now, stay still!" Whiteflower growled. The other kit snickered.

A yowl sounded from outside. Whiteflower beckoned her two kits out of the nursery into a clearing. As the white she-cat stepped outside, large golden spots glowed on her pelt. The camp was on an island in a swamp.

Clear green water was rippling from the activity of aquatic life. The

roar of a distant waterfall can be heard in the background. Pink magnolia trees decorated the clearing all around the camp. Water lilies floated lightly on the water's surface. A dragonfly darted in front of Lionkit's face, but his sister swiped it away before Lionkit could get distracted again.

A great cypress tree stood in the middle of the clearing. Fireclan's leader, Flamestar, stood in the center of the tree as if it were a throne. To his right was the clan deputy, Stormwhisker. His eyes glowed with pride. He was also the father of Whiteflower's three kits.

To Flamestar's left, the medicine cat, Silverheart. Sitting next to him was a sweet looking brown tabby she-cat. Her soft brown eyes glittered with excitement. Flamestar looked down at the two kits.

"You two, step forward," He flicked his tail for them to move forward. Lionkit bounded up happily to the great cypress, but his sister walked silently behind him. *Pshh. little siblings. He and Rosepaw are both like this. Big deal, new name, cool.* The striped golden kit thought bitterly.

"Brightkit and Lionkit, you have both reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be mentored. From this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you two will be known as Brightpaw and Lionpaw. Brightpaw, your mentor will be Nightfrost. I hope Nightfrost will pass down all he knows on to you." Flamestar's gave rested on a Spotted black and white tom with torn ears and a missing eye. His one blue eye was looking at Brightpaw thoughtfully.

"Nightfrost, you are ready to take on an apprentice. You have received excellent training from Iceheart, who has recently made her journey to Starclan, and thanks to her brother, Eaglesong, Iceheart was able to live to old age." Flamestar paused for a moment. "Nightfrost, you have shown yourself to be strong and fearless. You will be the mentor of Brightpaw, and I expect you to pass on all you know to Her.

Nightfrost touched noses with Brightpaw with lionkit looking on with jealousy as his sister gets such a strong senior warrior as a

mentor who hasn't had an apprentice in many moons. The two cats both stalked to the edge of the clearing. Brightpaw was dimly aware of her fellow clanmates calling her by her new name. Nightfrost looked down at her with a glittering eye, as if he was proud to have an apprentice that acts just like him.

"Lionpaw, your mentor will be Skyflight. I hope Skyflight will pass down all he knows. Skyflight, you are ready to take on your first apprentice. You have received excellent training from me, and you have shown yourself to be nimble and a quick thinker. You will be the mentor of Lionpaw, and I expect you to pass on all you know to Him."

A blueish tom with blue eyes padded up to Lionpaw and touched noses with him. Lionpaw then bounced ahead of his new mentor as they settled on the side of the great cypress. Cats were chanting Lionpaw's new name.

"Before I dismiss everyone, I want everyone to know we will have a gathering tonight. I want both Brightpaw and Lionpaw to go with their mentors to experience their first gathering!" Flamestar nodded to the two warriors and then waved his tail to dismiss the clan. Brightpaw headed to meet her sister, the medicine cat apprentice, Rosepaw. She was waiting at the base of the great cypress with proud, shining eyes.

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The full moon was shining bright in the sky. Cats were following in a line behind Flamestar. Brightpaw's pelt glowed silver along with her mentor's. Nightfrost is usually a grumpy, hard-headed cat who demanded respect and always had a sour attitude painted on his muzzle. However, he seems to take a liking to his new apprentice, for he talks to her in a smooth, calm voice.

"Brightpaw, what do you smell?" Nightfrost asked his apprentice gently. Brightpaw lifted her nose. A calm wind carried many different smells right to her, brushing her face like a fluffy tail.

"Hmmm... I smell something delicious and many other scents like grass and trees... I think I smell strange cats!" Brightpaw looked at

Nightfrost. He was looking down at Brightpaw with a wide eye.

"Is this your first time out of the camp?" Nightfrost asked. Brightpaw nodded. "Your sense of smell is outstanding. The delicious scents you smell are prey, the grass is the prairie, the trees are the forest, and the cats you smell must be from other clans. I wonder how you smell them, they are so far away..."

"I smell something nearby," Brightpaw whispered. Nightfrost drank in the air.

"You smell catfish. They look like a gray slimy fish without scales with whiskers just like us. If you see one, be very careful. Catfish have spikey fins and can stab you," Nightfrost warned his apprentice.

Brightpaw was looking at the water around a small path she was on.

The green water looked silver in the light, surrounding the pathway on both sides with silvery liquid. She spotted a movement near a fallen tree.

"Are we still in our territory?" Brightpaw asked Nightfrost. He nodded.

Brightpaw darted forward. Instead of wading in the water, she ran across the fallen trees and debris in the water. She jumped on a bundle of lily pads, riding them forward in the water like the monsters the twolegs used in the water.

She eyed the big fish sleeping below the tree. Brightpaw pounced. One forepaw landed on the head of the fish, and the other on the tail. The fish started to trash, sending water flying into Brightpaw's eyes. She held on and sank her fangs into the fish's head, avoiding its fins. The fish finally stopped moving.

Brightpaw carried her prize back onto the path where the other clan cats stopped in their tracks. They were staring at Brightpaw with wide eyes. Brightpaw took no notice. She dropped the fish in front of her mentor, who was frozen in shock. Nobody looked more

surprised than Flamestar himself.

"How did you do that? I never taught you how to hunt Catfish yet!" Nightfrost exclaimed. Brightpaw put one paw on her fish. It was as big as she was. She couldn't really explain how she knew what to do.

"There were minnows and sometimes perch that would sometimes pass by the shallows by the nursery. Me and my siblings would ride the lily pads and take the fish by surprise, but it's against the warrior code to hunt, so we always let the fish go in the end. And... I don't know. It just came to me!" Brightpaw looked at Lionpaw and Rosepaw. Lionpaw was shuffling his paws with embarrassment when his mentor looked at him. Rosepaw looked on with obvious pride.

"That's quite impressive," Flamestar said quietly to the three apprentices. "Let's hunt some later, maybe you can show us how to ride lily pads when we get back to camp, but we are going to be late to the gathering if we stop to eat." Flamestar flicked his tail to move forward. The cats began to follow.

"Here, hide the fish in this bramble. It will hide Its scent from predators." Nightfrost dug up some moss. Brightpaw buried her fish inside. The two cats then trotted back to the clan.

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The marsh soon turned into a lake. The muddy smell of the swamp soon transformed into a clear scent of pine trees and sand. Pawprints were left in the mud as the clan moved forward.

A large island big enough to fit about one hundred cats stood in the middle of the lake. Firestar was dragging a large hollowed-out log to the water.

"The first group, let's go!" Flamestar stood beside the log as half the cats in the patrol jumped in the log, including Brightpaw and Nightfrost. Lionpaw and Skyflight sat next to them. "Remember to use your paw to paddle! Stormwhisker, bring the log back with another warrior!" Flamestar commanded.

"Let's go!" Stormwhisker stood on the front of the log facing the island. The cats left at shore began to push the log into the water. The cats at the sides of the boat learned to paddle in the water. Nightfrost nodded to Brightpaw, and she joined in.

Brightpaw always loved the feel of water on her fur. Brightpaw sniffed the air. She saw two other logs from other sides of the lake. One log was coming from the grassland, and the other from a pine forest. Those must be the other clans.

The log finally arrived on the shore. The island had an enormous oak tree in the center. Reeds and cattails decorated the edges of the island. Brightpaw jumped out of the log. The sand was everywhere!

Brightpaw purred with delight when she saw more water that surrounded the great oak tree in the center of the island. The cats from other clans were just arriving in their logs. They all jumped out to knead the sand.

"Go ahead and listen to the cats talk. See if you can pick up any secrets! Be careful not to say too much yourself," Nightfrost tapped her nose and stalked up with the other warriors. Lionpaw and Rosepaw padded up to their sister.

"It's soooo cool!" Lionpaw purred. "Let's go meet the apprentices of other clans!" Lionpaw was already running towards a group of distinct looking apprentices. Rosepaw padded after her brother, but Brightpaw went to the shore to the edge of the clearing. She dove in the water.

Minnows and small fish swam around her nose as she swam gracefully like a cat from Leopardclan. She did flips and spirals. She hardly ever came up for air.

She was in a world of her own until something bumped into her. Icy blue eyes stared back at her from the water. A black pelt glistened in the rippling moonlight. He quickly darted to the surface of the water. Brightpaw followed him and her head broke the surface.

"Who are you?" The black tom growled. Brightpaw rolled her eyes. Empty threat. We have a truce tonight.

"I am Brightpaw of Fireclan. Now, who might you be?" Brightpaw said. The tom lifted his chin. He was only an ear bigger than she was, but Brightpaw was the biggest kit in the nursery, and the second biggest was her friend Rainkit. He must be older than her.

"I am Crowpaw of the fearless Waterclan, the rulers of the grasslands, and the cats descended from Tigerclan themselves!" Crowpaw announced dramatically. Brightpaw rolled her eyes.

"Well, whatever. What kind of warrior do you want to be, anyway?" Brightpaw asked. Crowpaw seemed to be taken aback by her question.

"Uhh.. my goal is to become a respected and powerful idol. I want to serve my clan the best I can, and I want to be well known and famous throughout the wetlands we call our home! What about you, Brightpaw?"

Crowpaw stared intently at her, waiting for a response. Brightpaw simply raised her head to look back at him

"I want to be strong. I want to be feared. I want all the kits who laughed at me to cower whenever they see me. I want their respect and loyalty. I will lead my clanmates into wars and conquer new lands." Brightpaw responded simply.

The stars above the two apprentices twinkled. A blinding white flash of light flew in a straight line behind Brightpaw's head. *It was almost as if twelve stars fell from the sky...* Crowpaw stared behind her but didn't get any time to respond. A yowl sounded from the clearing.

"Come on. This is my first gathering. I heard many stories, but I never have seen anything happen myself!" Brightpaw shook the water out of her fur and padded up the great oak.

"Well... this is my third gathering!" Crowpaw bragged, but Brightpaw silenced him with a glare. Three cats were sitting on a branch of the great oak. There was Flamestar, leader of Fireclan. A black and white cat named Eaglestar, leader of Waterclan, and then the brown-gold tabby tom by the name of Honeystar, leader of

Forestclan.

The tree leaders looked powerful and majestic on the oak tree. Flamestar stood up. It was Fireclan's turn to speak first at this gathering.

"Cats of all clans, we gather here today for another full moon gathering. We are thankful that Starclan gives us yet another twinkling night sky. I have good news for Fireclan today." Firestar meowed.

Honeystar glared at him with icy eyes. "We have two new apprentices. Please give a warm welcome to Brightpaw and Lionpaw," Meows of approval rose from the clearing. Flamestar nodded to Silverheart.

"We also have a new medicine cat apprentice," Silverheart meowed proudly.

"Meet Rosepaw, my new apprentice!" Cats bowed their heads respectfully to the new apprentice. Rosepaw shyly flicked her ears. Eaglestar stepped up next.

"I also have one new apprentice. I would like Everyone to meet my daughter, Orchidpaw," Meows and greetings rose up to meet a pretty pale pink cat with one silver and one green eye. She was stunningly beautiful. Honeystar thrust his way in front of the two toms.

"We had intruders last night!" He hissed. More hisses rose from around the oak.

"These cats smelled of the swamplands... of Fireclan!" Yowls rose from both clans.

"Honeystar, we can assure you that none of my cats have invaded your territory. Although leaf-bare is approaching, we have plenty of resources. In fact, one of the newest apprentices caught a catfish on the way here. Why would you think this, Honeystar?" Flamestar tried to convince Honeystar, but he just hissed again.

"Fool! Our patrols met with these intruders and had a battle! Don't

you dare call me an idiot!" Honeystar snarled. His cats echoed him. Flamestar sighed but glared back.

"What proof do you have? It might just be some rogues."

"Do you accuse me of lying?!" Honeystar yowled. "Say that you're guilty, Flamestar, or this means war!" Brightpaw's fur was bristling. She looked to her side at Crowpaw. He looked somewhat guilty. Flamestar looked at the snarling brown tom for what seemed like nine lifetimes.

"Then war it will be." Flamestar bared his fangs and hissed at Honeystar. Honeystar yowled back at him. The cats in the clearing glared at each other. Waterclan cats stood in between them.

"This gathering is over!" Eaglestar announced and waved his tail for his warrior to follow him. Crowpaw waved a quick goodbye with his tail to Brightpaw and headed back to his clan.

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Brightpaw grabbed her fish on the way back and headed to the nursery. Whiteflower was waiting for her, eyes glittering with pride as Brightpaw carried the catfish to her.

"Oh, my sweet little star! Did you catch that all by yourself? Thank you!" Whiteflower licked the top of Brightpaw's head before she headed for the freshkill pile. She picked out a small bass and carried it to where her clanmates were eating.

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Bloodstained Dreams

[image]

One moon has passed since the gathering. Brightpaw was running with all the speed she had. She and Nightfrost have been out training when a huge group of cats attacked them. Brightpaw smelled them first, telling Nightfrost. He instantly ordered her to run. Brightpaw hears furious yowls from behind her, but she resisted the temptation to turn back.

She ran across the trees and jumped from tree to tree. She was still going too slow. Brightpaw started jumping from the tops of the trees. She dove into the cold water and swam her way back to camp.

"Invaders! Forestclan is attacking! Guard the camp! Surround the entrance and the corners!" Brightpaw yowled as she ran past the magnolia trees and reeds around the camp. Nobody realized that a new apprentice gave the order, but warriors of all ages started to gather around the entrance.

Flamestar pelted into the clearing and started barking similar orders. Brightpaw unsheathed her claws and glared at the entrance. She smelled a distinct odor of pine trees coming from behind her. *Oh no.*

"Behind us! They are-" Brightpaw didn't have time to finish before cats broke through the reeds around the camp. The warriors of Fireclan heard her warning, for they were already turned and fighting against the brown intruders.

Brightpaw barreled into a skinny brown warrior, his green eyes wide with surprise. He was her size, but the tom was much older and more experienced. He kicked her with his hind legs. Brightpaw swerved out the way to counter with a blow with her claws.

She scraped his face viciously, a move Nightfrost taught her. It was also Brightpaw's favorite battle move. The warrior let out a

caterwaul and escaped her grasp. His face was unrecognizable and covered with red. He swiftly retreated into the reeds.

Brightpaw scanned the area around her for the next cat to tackle. She felt her heart sink below the ground as a white tom pinned a pretty brown tabby to the ground. Rosepaw! Her sister was desperately trying to free herself from the warrior's grasp. Lionpaw was standing frozen with shock a few foxlenths away.

He spotted Brightpaw and then retreated into the marsh. *What is he doing?!*

Rosepaw yowled as the white warrior's teeth met the back of her neck. Brightpaw let out a battle cry and charged at the warrior, bowling him off her sister with all her weight.

The tom spun around, claws unsheathed. He slashed at her but missed. Brightpaw darted behind the warrior and dug her claws in his shoulders. She bit his left ear and pulled. The warrior yelped and bucked her off. Blood from his ear was pouring down his face. *You will remember me!*

The white warrior suddenly changed his attitude and quickly lunged at Brightpaw. She wasn't prepared this time. She felt a long, sharp claw scrape across her face and her left eye.

Brightpaw jumped back with a wail. The warrior moved closer to her, but Brightpaw knocked the wind out of him with another bodyslam. Brightpaw pinned him down and started to scratch his face and neck furiously, hissing with rage. The white warrior started to cry like a kit and Brightpaw lost her grasp as he fled the battle. Brightpaw gave him one last warning nip on the leg.

She looked around the clearing. She was one of the last cats to chase away an intruder. A silver tabby with long whip-thin black ears was running swiftly to Brightpaw with a worried look on her face.

"Brightpaw! Are you okay?" The tabby meowed.

"I'm fine, Rainpaw. It's just a scratch. Where is my sister?"

Brightpaw demanded. Rainpaw froze. She pointed her muzzle to a heap of brown fur in the center of the clearing.

Brightpaw couldn't keep herself from yowling in alarm and grief. She ran up to her sister. Lionpaw was nowhere to be seen. A warrior by the name of Stagleap was by Rosepaw. He was a handsome brown tom with a white underbelly and white spots on his back. He was sitting beside Whiteflower and licking her ears. She was whimpering with her head tucked in between two cats. One of them was Rosepaw-and the other Stormwhisker.

No no no! Brightpaw looked around the clearing for Lionpaw or her mentor. Flamestar and two other warriors were dragging a black and white tom to the center of the clearing.

Brightpaw wailed once again and ran up to her dead mentor. Nightfrost almost looked at peace, with his one eye closed. Brightpaw looked down at her paws. Three of the closest cats to her have died. Her father, her sister, and her mentor.

Brightpaw curled up next to her mother to lick her sister's ruffled fur for the last time. I will avenge you. Brightpaw didn't notice Lionpaw sneaking back in the camp with shame written all over his face.

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It had been many moons since the battle between Fireclan and Forestclan. The two clans are still at war with Honeystar still throwing accusations at Flamestar. After the death of Stormwhisker, A pretty gray she-cat with green eyes was appointed the new deputy and the mentor of Brightpaw. She was a great trainer, teaching Brightpaw battle moves that originated from Leopardclan themselves.

Brightpaw no longer talked to her brother anymore. Instead, she hung out with two other she-cats. A kit who was two moons younger than herself was Rainpaw. The second cat was several moons away from Brightpaw. Her pelt was dappled with the color of river stones. Her name was Pebblepaw. The young cat started her training as a warrior, but now she was training to become a
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medicine cat. Brightpaw adored both of them.

Today, Brightpaw was on a patrol with her mentor, Willowfog, while Flamestar tagged along. Brightpaw had killed a baby alligator and had it claimed proudly in her jaws. She was nearly bigger than both Flamestar and her own mentor. Flamestar purred with approval at her catch.

"Skyflight has confirmed that Lionpaw is ready to become a warrior. Willowfog, you said Brightpaw's training was going fantastic, correct?" Flamestar looked at Willowfog. She nodded, unable to speak while carrying a fish in her jaws.

"Then it is time."

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Cats were gathered in the clearing in the swamp. The Fireclan cats took their usual position around the cypress tree. For the first time in moons, Brightpaw was sitting next to Lionpaw. Flamestar was looking down at them from his spot on the tree.

"I, Flamestar, leader of Fireclan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as a warrior in their turn. Brightpaw, Lionpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do." Brightpaw meowed.

"I do." Lionpaw echoed.

"Then by the powers of Starclan, I give you your warrior names. Brightpaw and Lionpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Brightsun and Lionfur. Starclan honors your resilience and strength and we welcome you as full warriors of Fireclan!"

Flamestar jumped down from his perch to rest his muzzle on Brightsun's head. Brightsun licked his shoulder in turn, and Lionfur did the same.

"Brightsun! Lionfur! Brightsun! Lionfur!" The cats in the clearing chanted the new warrior's names. Flamestar was back on his perch.

"I have one more ceremony to perform. Swanwing's kits are prepared to start their training." Two kits were sitting in front of a white queen with yellow eyes.

One kit looked exactly like her, his yellow eyes blazing with excitement. The other kit was white with a red chest and belly with green eyes. Flamestar beckoned the kits forward with his tail. The two kits calmly walked up to the base of the cypress.

"Dragonkit and Robinkit, you two have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for both of you to be apprenticed. From this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Dragonpaw and Robinpaw. Dragonpaw, your mentor will be Brightsun. I hope Brightsun will pass down all she knows on to you. Brightsun, you are ready to take on your first apprentice. You have received excellent training from Nightfrost and Willowfog, and you have shown yourself to be fearless and clever. You will be the mentor of Dragonkit, and I expect you to pass on all you know to him."

Brightsun went forward to meet Dragonkit. She was about three times bigger than the scrap of fur. Brightsun now had a long, menacing scar across the left side of her face and over her eye. No wonder Dragonpaw was cowering under her gaze. She bent her head down so Dragonpaw could touch her nose. After a moment's hesitation, he touched noses with her and followed her to the edge of the clearing obediently.

"Lionfur, you are ready to take your first apprentice as well. You have received excellent training from Skyflight, and you have shown yourself to be quick-thinking and speedy. You will be the mentor of Robinpaw, and I expect you to pass on all you know to him."

Lionfur touched noses with Robinpaw and then retreated to the edge of the clearing together.

"Brightsun and Lionfur, according to tradition, you must do a silent

vigil throughout the night to guard the camp. Tomorrow, you may take the day off. Your apprentices will go on dawn patrol while you rest." Flamestar waved his tail and the meeting was over.

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The morning after her guard duty Brightsun had dreamt of a young cat about her age chasing down a Waterclan warrior. She was looking through the eyes of the young warrior around her age.

"I got him!" She snarled as her claws flashed in front of her. All four of her paws were black and her pelt was golden with small black specks on her spine.

"Starfall, get back here!" Her leader, Cranestar commanded as Starfall lept up a tree. The cat she was chasing was a warrior from Waterclan. The black warrior had been on a patrol with a group of other Waterclan cats before they accidently slipped through into Fireclan territory. In Starfall's mind, trespassing is unforgivable!

Starfall's mind flashed to a crown made of bones that was mounted on a wall in the medicine cat den. The crown belonged to Dawnstripe, a relative of hers. Dawnstripe never followed orders, not from Starclan or her leader. Stories about the wretched she-cat were told to the kits of all clans, like the stories of Sunstar herself that spread throughout entire wetlands.

Dawnstripe started life as a shy, timid warrior but her left eye was blinded during a battle and her right eye was partially blurred. She suddenly took interest in becoming a medicine cat and gained the favor of Starclan. They didn't know, however, that Dawnstripe would suddenly develop strange powers even they didn't possess.

Starclan can see the future, but it's always hazy. They would deliver prophecies to the medicine cats so that the clan would at least have an idea of what may happen.

But not Dawnstripe. Her dreams were intercepted by cats of the Dark Swamp, and Dawnstripe awoke one morning with new powers. At will the blind she-cat was able to see the future at will. She was able to pinpoint attacks from other clans.

She was the voice of Fireclan and she nearly took Cranestar's place as leader, even if he had just received his nine lives from Starclan, he was no match for the medicine cat and her mysterious seer abilities.

The once shy cat turned into a vicious, terrifying golden foe of Starclan. The only time she wasn't able to see the future was in her sleep. One night, Starclan sent a rattlesnake to kill Dawnstripe. They succeeded and she was dead the next morning.

Starfall always admired her aunt. The pure fact that she was related to such a powerful, feared cat gave her courage. She aspired to be like Dawnstripe. She visited the medicine cat den often just to get a glimpse of the skull crown. The only reason. Fireclan kept the crown for the leader to wear it into full-on war into other clan territory. The sight of the crown on the leader's head was a terrifying sight.

Cranestar had already worn it once while invading Forestclan camp. Starfall hungered for the chance to wear it. She was going to prove how strong she was by chasing this black Waterclan warrior down.

Starfall ignored all the commands of the senior warriors as she relentlessly chased the black tom. He constantly looked over his shoulder only to see the small gold warrior getting closer and closer. She was in the trees above him while he ran along a trail towards the grassland. His home! He just had to cross the border and he would be safe!

Starfall could already imagine her clan cheering for her. Cranestar would apologize for trying to stop her chase along with the other senior warriors. She would be a hero! The sun was setting, but that was no problem for a fearsome cat like her! She was going to tear this tom to bloody shreds!

Starfall was about to pounce on the warrior's back but a glint in the sky caught her eye. It was a twinkling star. The star was beautiful and bright. She momentarily forgot about the Waterclan tom to stare at the star. She was frozen in place. It was beautiful...

For what it seemed like forever her eyes locked with the star. It was

now glowing brighter and fiercer. It was nighttime at last and the star lit up the sky with a dark azure blue from its radiance.

"*Starfall*! Starfall, where are you?" She heard her sister, Windwisp, calling. Starfall didn't respond. Instead she reached out her right paw to the bright star. Bright star. *That sounds like a good name for a leader,* Starfall thought.

For a brief moment the forest was silent. The wind stopped blowing. The crickets were silent. Not even the water moved. Starfall felt a dark presence near her.

Move! Run away! A loud voice rang in her head. The voice sounded like her own, only older. *Get out of the way! Staclan wants you dead, you need to mo-*

The stranger did not get a chance to finish their sentence. Starfall felt something pierce through the pad of her extended paw and exit through the back of her neck. She gagged on her own blood and lost her balance on the tree. She was falling... just like the star was...

NO! curse Starclan! Give me a chance to live! The voice roared with outrage. Starfall's world faded away as she splashed into the dark water of the swamp

~*~

Red Water

[image]

"Use the debris and logs floating in the water to walk or run across the water," Brightsun jumped on top of a fallen tree nearly submerged in water. I can move a little like Starfall. I wonder who she was. Brightsun thought as she effortlessly walked through the debris of the swamp. Dragonpaw steadily balanced on the log.

"Good job, now try to keep up!" Without further warning, Brightsun dashed to another log, launching herself high into the air like a frog. She landed gracefully on all four paws. She looked back at her apprentice, who was kneading the wood with his fluffy paws.

"It's okay. I fell off before, there are no leeches in the swamps here!" Brightsun purred reassuringly. Dragonpaw hesitated again before leaping across the water. He landed on the next log but stumbled in doing so.

Brightsun purred her approval and quickly jumped again. This time, she landed on some lily pads. Each of her four paws landed on a pad, carrying her across the water. She then jumped off the lilies and climbed up a tree. She sat down and began to groom herself. The early leaf-bare air ruffled her fur.

"Try and ride a lily pad. It takes a long time to master, but it is very helpful in the long run! Just land on four lily pads or one big one and keep your balance to sail across the water." Brightpaw meowed.

"But-Brightsun! I can never do that!" Dragonpaw meowed at her. Brightsun shook her head.

"Never say never, Dragonpaw. I learned this as a kit, I'm confident that you can pull this trick off. I know it!" Dragonpaw purred at his mentor's praise. He paced the log for a while before finally jumping off. His feet landed clumsily on the lily pads, keeping his right forepaw up.

His tail flailed wildly as he tried to keep his balance. He traveled a couple of foxlenths before tumbling back-first into the water. His white head broke the surface of the water and he was churning his paws madly to find a foothold. Panic flashed in his eyes. Brightsun went down to meet him as soon as he found a dead log to sit on.

"Nice job! You did better than me on my first try, I can tell you that." Brightsun licked his ear.

"I-I don't know how to swim!" Dragonpaw meowed miserably. He avoided his mentor's golden gaze. Brightsun slithered into the water with barely a ripple and started to swim around the log with the grace of a swan.

She twirled and flipped in the water as if she were an otter instead of a cat. Dragonpaw stared at her with wide eyes.

"How did you do that?" He asked her.

"Come in and I'll show you. We will stay in the shallows, I promise." Brightsun held out one paw for her apprentice. He slowly waded into the green water. Brightsun grabbed the scruff of his neck and lifted him off the ground so he could paddle.

"I'm swimming! Brightsun, I'm swimming!" He meowed while paddling his feet in a better and more graceful motion. The mentor and apprentice spent another hour swimming. Soon, Dragonpaw was swimming all by himself. He even learned how to twirl underwater. The cats trained until dawn. Brightsun was racing Dragonpaw back to camp. Brightsun was waiting at the entrance three minutes before Dragonpaw made it. He was painting like a dog while Brightsun didn't even sweat.

"When the day comes that you beat me in a race, it will be the same day you would be made a warrior! As I said, it takes a lot of practice and skill, but one day you will be a great fighter. Now get some sleep." Brightsun meowed.

Dragonpaw dipped his head and headed to the apprentice's den. He was the last apprentice to go in. Brightsun was about to enter the warrior's den when she spotted two familiar shapes near the

medicine cat's den. Brightsun lifted her tail.

"Rainpuddle! Pebblepaw! What is going on?" Brightsun stopped purring when she saw the grim looks on their faces. Pebblepaw looked heartbroken. Rainpuddle was the one to speak.

"Silverheart has greencough." she whispered. Brightsun's tail dropped.

"It's too early for greencough! Is it?" Brightsun asked.

"You can still catch it early. I think he's dying! I'm not ready to become a medicine cat! I only trained for like, five moons! It's not enough!" Pebblepaw wailed. Rainpuddle pressed her nose in her friend's fur.

"It's going to be okay, Pebblepaw. You have Starclan to guide you." Brightsun meowed. Pebblepaw looked at her and nodded.

"I suppose you are right. Goodnight, you two." Brightsun padded off to the warrior's den. The smell of herbs reminded her of something... like a memory. She curled up and fell asleep.

~*~

That night, Brightsun dreamed she was in the medicine cat's den. She was sorting herbs rapidly. A crown of bones hung eerily from the wall and glowed in the moonlight. Something bothered her. She was sleepy and the images in her head were blurred.

An agonizing pain then suddenly shot through her head as she received hundreds upon thousands of visions at once, all of them ending in death. Before she could do anything else, pain rippled through her leg.

A feeling colder than ice inched its way through her veins. The cat collapsed and gasped for air. Searing pain erupted in her chest. She closed her eyes, unable to move. She then heard an eerie rattle of a tail.

~*~

Brightsun awoke with a start. She looked at her leg, expecting to see a rattlesnake bite, yet nothing was there.

She lifted her gaze to the sky to stare at the stars. There was an uncomfortable feeling inside her. *I don't think Staclan sent that dream...*

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Six moons have passed. The morning air was filled with gloomy fog. Brightsun was on dawn patrol with her old mentor, Willowfog, her apprentice, Dragonpaw, and her brother and his apprentice. She had not spoken a single word the entire patrol.

Today, they were checking the border between Fireclan and Forestclan. A small pond separated the two clans. The pond was plentiful in fish as early greenleaf started to come about. Willowfog opened her jaw and drank in the air. She silently commanded the patrol with her tail to move forward with caution.

The five cats quietly moved down to the pond to drink. Brightsun and her apprentice bent down to lap up the water. The strange smell of pine trees filled her nose. Dragonpaw was also looking in the same direction as she was.

Dragonpaw hissed as two brown Forestclan cats trotted down to the pond to drink. The cats of Fireclan were so busy glaring at the cats at the other end of the pond they didn't notice the threat behind them.

Brightsun lifted her head at the last second to see a familiar white cat slammed her into the water along with the other Fireclan cats. About eight Forestclan cats guarded the edge of the water, snarling and spitting at the cats in the water. *How DARE they attack us in OUR territory!*

Brightsun nudged Dragonpaw with her tail. Her apprentice nodded as they swam underwater together. The two cats eyed the same white cat that pushed Brightsun into the water. When Brightsun flicked her tail, the two Fireclan cats darted out of the water.
~~~

The huge white tom yelped in surprise and he was quickly dragged underwater. Brightsun dug her overgrown fangs into the back of the warrior's neck while Dragonpaw held him below the surface. The forest cat had no practice swimming or holding his breath.

The warrior was quickly using all his energy to escape Brightsun's death grip, but it was a bad move. He ran out of oxygen and suddenly went still. Bubbles were leaving his mouth and nose and his empty green eyes stared at the ground. Dragonpaw launched himself off the pond floor and his head broke the surface of the water. Brightsun stared down at the white cat. His left ear was torn. His neck and face were scratched up and scarred. *It's him. I did it Rosepaw. I actually did it. You have been avenged.*

As Brightsun broke the surface of the water and took a breath in, she felt a rush of a new emotion. She felt powerful. She felt invincible. She felt as if she could do anything. Brightsun yowled her triumph as she raced onto shore with Dragonpaw on her heels. The Forestclan cats wailed with surprise as the two Fireclan cats attacked them. Willowfog, Lionfur, and Robinpaw all jumped out of the water. The Forestclan cats outnumbered them, but the element of surprise overtook them. The Forestclan cats fled before they lost more fighters

"Dragonpaw, come with me. We need to tell Flamestar. Lionfur, Robinpaw, and Willowfog, stay here in case they come back!" Brightsun ordered while turning to Willowfog for her input. Something glittered in the deputy's eyes as she smiled and nodded her approval of the plan.

Brightsun and Dragonpaw raced back to camp. Today, Dragonpaw's steps and leaps were flawless. His small body allowed him to slip past brambles that Brightsun couldn't get past. He was about two paces ahead of her when she reached camp.

"Flamestar! We have Forestclan intruders on our side of the border near the pond! We need backup!" Brightsun yowled into the clearing. Flamestar heard her warning and abandoned a frog he was eating. He immediately began to throw orders around. The Fireclan leader nodded to Brightsun as they followed her and Dragonpaw to the battle.

Brightsun and her apprentice dashed through the treetops. Brightsun looked back at Dragonpaw and the rest of the clan, who were all having trouble keeping up with them.

"Almost there!" Brightsun gave out a battle cry as she saw the Forestclan invaders fighting her brother and Robinpaw. She dove out of the trees with the other Fireclan warriors and landed on top of a small brown tom. He yelped and snapped around to face his attacker. He instantly flinched when she saw Brightsun's menacing glare and her huge size. She turned him over and kicked him with her back legs. He screeched again as Brightsun dug her claws in his shoulders. Brightsun let him go when he cried out again, and he ran to his side of the border.

"Dragonpaw!" Brightsun yowled to her apprentice. He was searching for someone to fight. The young white tom instantly ran over to her.

"Help me attack cats from the water. Don't kill any this time." Brightsun meowed, and her apprentice nodded. They both shot under the green swamp water. Dragonpaw manages to snag a random golden-brown cat and drag him under. Brightsun sunk her teeth in the cat's leg while Dragonpaw yanked the scruff of its neck.

The cat squirmed wildly and let out a muffled yowl of fear. Dragonpaw let go of the cat when Brightsun nodded to him. The Forestclan cat quickly rose above the surface. Dragonpaw followed closely behind his mentor as Brightsun chased the cat with surprising speed. She lunged out of the water and landed on top of the fleeing brown-gold tom.

The cat hissed and turned around to face their attacker. Brightsun dug her claws in his hind legs and bit his tail. The Forestclan cat yowled and dug his claws in the back of her neck. She felt his claws meet bone, but she refused to let go of the cat's leg. She held on with all her power. This cat was smaller than her, but had better battle moves.

Her claws screeched against a rock as Brightsun held her ground. She would rather die fighting for her clan instead of running away like a coward. Brightsun suddenly felt the Forestclan cat's weight

lift off her, and his teeth leave her scruff. She instantly turned to face her enemy, but her fur prickled with what she saw.

It was Lionfur. He was now fighting the Forestclan cat. He was smaller than the enemy, but he held his ground. His shiny unscarred golden fur gleamed in the light. He lashed out with both his claws and toppled the Forestclan cat over on his back. He then kicked the cat with hind legs and dug his teeth in the cat's throat.

The cat screeched and rolled over back on their legs and bolted away from Lionfur's grasp. The Forestclan cat hissed something to Lionfur before yowling loudly and retreating into the pine forest. Other Forestclan cats pricked their ears and followed the golden-brown cat, hissing at the Fireclan cats one last time before disappearing into the brambles.

Lionfur was the first to cry out his victory. The other Fireclan cats joined in. Flamestar looked on proudly at Lionfur. Brightsun wasn't looking at her brother, but instead her apprentice who was getting out of the water and shaking droplets off his fur. Brightsun licked off the water in between his ears.

"Are you okay?" Dragonpaw asked his mentor anxiously as he eyed the bite marks on the back of Brightsun's neck. She pressed her nose into her apprentice's fur and purred.

"I'm fine, Dragonpaw. I'm impressed with you. You used your small size to beat me to the camp. You also fought like a warrior in today's battle," Brightsun purred. Dragonpaw looked up at his mentor with shining eyes.

"Fireclan! Back to the camp!" Flamestar commanded, and the cats followed him. Brightsun bounded ahead of the other warriors to meet with Flamestar. He looked at her and nodded, letting her speak.

"I think it's time Dragonpaw became a warrior. Today he has shown great skills in battle and beat me on the way to camp to warn everybody." Brightsun meowed. Flamestar instantly nodded.

"I think it's time for both Dragonpaw and Robinpaw to become

warriors today. I saw them both fight myself." Flamestar meowed. Sorrow glittered in his eyes as he looked away, his ears flat and tail drooping. Brightsun let herself fall back behind to her apprentice. Has something happened? Brightsun looked back behind the long line of Fireclan cats. Her fur prickled and her heart flipped as she spotted a gray tabby being dragged by two apprentices. Brightsun padded up to them.

"Firepaw, Icepaw, what happened?" Brightsun growled at a long-haired red tom and a small blue tom. The red cat looked like Flamestar himself but with green eyes, and Icepaw looked like Skyflight with the same blue eyes.

The red tom was half the size of Brightsun at only eight moons old, but he was still intimidated by Brightsun's rippling muscles and battle-scarred body. He flinched under her golden gaze. His ears flicked nervously.

"My mother- she was killed by Honeystar!" Firepaw wailed pitifully. Icepaw licked his friend's muzzle. Brightsun looked down at the gray tabby the apprentices were dragging. It was no doubt Willowfog. Her beautiful fur was matted with mud.

"Let me help. She was once my mentor, I want to help bury her with the honor she deserves."

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"Cats of Fireclan, gather around the Great Cypress for a clan meeting!" Flamestar yowled from his perch in the tree. Cats gathered around the tree with tired paws. Brightsun looked up at him with hesitation.

"Dragonpaw and Robinpaw, step forward," Flamestar called into the crowd. The two brothers looked at each other in surprise and stepped forward.

"I, Flamestar, leader of Fireclan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these two apprentices. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as a warrior in their turn. Dragonpaw and Robinpaw, do you

promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do." Dragonpaw and Robinpaw meowed at the same time.

"Then by the powers of Starclan, I give you your warrior names. Dragonpaw and Robinpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Dragonflight and Robinfeather. Starclan honors your skill and bravery and we welcome you as full warriors of Fireclan."

Flamestar jumped down from his perch to rest his muzzle on Dragonflight's head. The new warrior licked his shoulder in turn, and Robinfeather did the same as his brother.

"Dragonflight! Robinfeather! Dragonflight! Robinfeather!" The clan cats cheered. Brightsun and Lionfur were amongst the loudest. Brightsun felt her heart swell with pride as Dragonflight raised his head confidently.

"Tonight, these new warriors shall remain in the clearing to play a silent vigil and guard the camp while the clan gets a good night's sleep. I have one more announcement to make. Our beloved deputy and my mate, Willowfog, has died in Honeystar's jaws. May her journey to Scarclan be honored. Me, Brightsun, Firepaw, and the elders will bury her tonight. But not now, for it is almost moonhigh, and I must appoint a new deputy." Flamestar jumped back on his perch and looked at the stars.

"Today, one warrior has chased off Honeystar, critically injuring him and avenged Willowfog." Flamestar paused.

"I say these words before the body of Willowfog, so that her spirit may hear and approve of my choice." Flamestar tweaked his whiskers for a moment. "The new deputy of Fireclan is Lionfur."

Cats came around Lionfur and started to thank and congratulate him on chasing off Honeystar and becoming a deputy. Lionfur looked utterly confused. The only cat that didn't congratulate him was Brightsun.

She sat where she was staring at her brother with surprise. *No. This*

isn't right. I would have chased Honeystar off! I was the one who injured him! Lionfur only attacked him afterward! Foxdung!

Brightsun took a deep breath. She licked Dragonflight's head in congratulations and praise, but she remained in the clearing until all the cats left and headed into their dens. Lionfur also remained in the clearing, dazed.

Brightsun calmly padded to him. Her brother jumped when he turned around to look at Brightsun. His eyes were apologetic and sad. Brightsun quietly hissed at him.

"Don't think I forgot the time you let Rosepaw die. I won't ever forgive you for that! I wish you were dead in Starclan with her!" Brightsun hissed and padded off to the elder's den to help bury Willowfog, leaving Lionfur starting after her in the center of the clearing with terrified eyes.

***

Much Too Soon

[image]

A startled yowl at early dawn woke Brightsun up from a dreamless sleep. Vicious snarling erupted from the clearing. Warriors instantly streamed out from their den.

"Forestclan! Forestclan has come to attack our camp!" Brightsun heard Dragonflight yowl as a brown warrior flew into his side. Brightsun rushed over to help him, but a black warrior slashed her claws across Brightsun's back. Brightsun hissed and turned to face the warrior, showing no signs of pain in her face as she ran head-first into the Forestclan warrior.

The black she-cat landed on her back and Brightsun rushed in to deliver the move she was well known for. Brightsun slashed the black warrior's face with her sharp claws. One claw dug into the she-cat's left eye, making her wail.

Brightsun reluctantly let her go. The black warrior didn't look back as she retreated into the reeds. Brightsun looked around the clearing. Clumps of fur and blood littered the clearing.

Out of the corner of her eye, she spotted Lionfur wrestling with a strangely familiar white she-cat. She was a beautiful small white warrior with very familiar green eyes. Her fangs dug into the back of Lionfur's neck, and he cried out for help. Brightsun simply watched him struggle for a couple more heartbeats and charged at the white warrior and flung her off the cowering golden tom. Brightsun's unsheathed claws raked across the white warrior's pelt and face.

The warrior's eyes widened as she looked at Brightsun, but her eyes did not show any recognition. Brightsun slashed at the warrior one last time before the she-cat took off into the reeds beyond the camp.

A yowl of victory sounded from the other side of the clearing. Flamestar had matted fur, but his eyes blazed with fury as he hissed

at the fleeing Forestclan cats. He stumbled and leaned into the medicine cat's side, who was fighting next to him.

Pebblepelt led him to her den along with many other wounded warriors. Brightsun noticed that almost all the wounded warriors had bite marks on the back of their neck. Unbelievable! Forestclan tried to kill us!" Brightsun thought furiously.

She turned around to check on her brother. She found Whiteflower along with a warrior named Stagleap grooming her old kit's golden fur. She looked up at Brightsun with sorrow painted across her face. Brightsun held her breath as she recalled the last thing she said to Lionfur.

"Don't think I forgot the time you let Rosepaw die. I won't ever forgive you for that! I wish you were dead in Starclan with her!"

Brightsun's wish came true, but too soon. Much too soon.

***

The wounded warriors in the clearing were licking themselves or waiting in line by Pebblepelt's den. Brightsun went to check on her friend. She peeked her head in the den to see Rainpuddle and Pebblepelt caring for Flamestar and other warriors. Rainpuddle looked at Brightsun as she entered the small cave.

"Flamestar has lost another life while saving Whiteflower, she is very close to kitting. He has two remaining. We also lost many warriors, more kits will be helpful," Pebblepelt whispered quietly. Brightsun licked her friend's head. And waved goodbye to the medicine cat and Rainpuddle.

Brightsun trotted over to the nursery. Whiteflower was laying on her side with her tail over her muzzle. Stagleap was licking wounds on her back. He nodded when he saw Brightsun enter.

"Are you two okay?" Brightsun asked quietly. Stagleap nodded.

"Lionfur. Is he really-?" Whiteflower whimpered. Brightsun licked her mother's ears.

"You are my only kit left right now, Brightsun. Keep it that way." Whiteflower meowed before Brightsun left the nursery. She picked a fish from the fresh-kill pile and sat alone by the great cypress. She was tearing the fish apart when a shy black apprentice sat by her.

His fur black fur was matted with mud. He was carrying a small dove in his jaws and started to eat. He took no notice that a huge battle-scarred warrior was right next to him. Brightsun looked at the apprentice. He looked like he just came out of the nursery. Oakshade's kit. Brightsun recalled.

"Shadowpaw, how is it going?" Brightsun meowed. The little tom jumped and looked up at the golden warrior. His ears went back in surprise. He stared blankly at Brightsun and then nodded.

"Fine!" He mewed quietly. His tail twitched nervously. "Excuse me," Shadowpaw grabbed his dove and quickly trotted to the elder's den. So much for having a conversation with the new apprentices. Brightsun thought.

A yowl from above her broke her thoughts when a familiar call reached her ears. Flamestar was back on his perch, his fur groomed and unscathed as if a battle had never happened His eyes were clouded with sorrow. He lifted his head.

"Cats of Fireclan, I bring sad news. Our new deputy, Lionfur, has died along with five other warriors. I want to appoint a new deputy as soon as possible." He looked up at the sky.

"I say these words before the body of Lionfur so that his spirit may hear and approve of my choice. The new deputy of Fireclan is Brightsun." Brightsun knew she should feel proud, but her heart felt hollow. Cats started swarming her and congratulating her, including Dragonflight. She instantly got to her paws and started calling names like she had seen her father and Willowfog do so often. She had unknowingly memorized the same cats that would usually go on each patrol.

"Mistygaze and Eaglefeather, each bring your apprentices, Icepaw and Firepaw for sun-high patrol. Swanwing, Shadowpaw, and Dragonflight, you will go on dusk patrol. Silverpuddle, Brownpaw,

and Chimepaw will go out on the first hunting patrol at sun-high." Stagleap was Bridpaw's mentor, but Brightsun decided to leave him out to take care of Whiteflower.

"I will lead another hunting patrol at dusk." She waved her tail in dismissal. The cats around the clearing stared at her as if they were trying to figure out how she had organized patrols so quickly. Brightsun jumped on top of a rock and started to sharpen her claws. After her long, curved claws were sleek and shiny, she curled up and went to sleep.

This was the beginning of the real story...

~*~

That night Brightsun dreamed she was in the view of another golden warrior much like herself. He had similar stripes on his back along with leopard-like spots. He was in the thick of fighting what appeared to be some kind of large spotted cat.

The bobcat hissed and slashed at the clan cats with her long claws. Her kits were cowering in a den behind her. Brightsun, whoever she was, was dodging with ease.

"Nightfrost, take the left side of the bobcat! Flamepelt, take right!" She shouted. Her voice was that of a young tom, just old enough to be considered a seasoned warrior.

"Yes, Leopardshine!" Said the two warriors. They followed his orders and took position. The bobcat hissed, now surrounded. She charged in front of her at the young tom.

He jumped out of the way with incredible speed and kicked the large cat away with his back legs. Another large tom rammed the bobcat's side. He had short tabby fur with yellow eyes.

"Birchstar, you came!" Leopardshine purred. Birchstar calmly smiled at his deputy. When Birchstar was distracted, the bobcat pounced.

Birchstar was rolled on his back. He yowled and tried to kick the bobcat off him. He was on his last life, and he couldn't afford to lose it!

Leopardshine snarled and struck the bobcat. Together, they rolled over, a hissing ball of fur and claws. The bobcat managed to snag one of Leopardshine's legs and with a sickening crack, his leg snapped.

Leopardshine yowled with fury and pain. He dug his long fangs into the bobcat's neck. The large feline howled and let him go. She darted into the swamp with her two gray kits following her.

"Leopardshine!" Two young cats had followed Birchstar to the battle. They sunk to their knees.

"Get the medicine cat! Get help!" A gray tom cried.

"Skypaw, there is nothing we can do," Flamepelt grieved and rubbed his apprentice's pelt with his own.

"He's my big brother and my mentor, he can't die!" A pretty white she-cat stammered. Between the sunlight's rays through the trees, gold spots glowed.

"It's okay, Whitepaw. I will see you again in Starclan, I promise..." Leopardshine tried to purr. Red spots clouded his vision as darkness overtook his vision. Cries of grief was the last thing he heard.

~*~

A paw was bumping her side when Brightsun woke up. She growled in annoyance. She opened her eyes to see Pebblepelt prodding her. She wore a smile on her face.

"Go check the nursery!" She purred with happiness. Brightsun instantly got to her paws and rushed to the nursery.

She saw Stagleap at the entrance letting cats in. Brightsun would always go and see new kits and she was not surprised to see him there.

He nodded as she approached. Brightsun slipped inside. Whiteflower lay on her side with three tiny kits beside her. She looked up at Brightsun with twinkling eyes. Her white pelt glittered gold in the sunlight. My mother looks a lot like that young

apprentice in my dream...

"Meet Goldkit, Silverkit, and Bronzekit your new sister and brothers!" She purred. Brightsun took a closer look at the kits. A little golden She-cat was the second largest kit. Her pelt had small brown-black stripes like Brightsun herself. *That must be Goldkit.* Brightsun thought.

One tom was very large, his pelt was a soft tabby brown color like Rosepaw herself complete with white spots on his back. He also had four silver paws. *Little Bronzekit.*

The last tom was quite small. His pelt was stormy gray. He also had a silver line running from his head to his tail like a chipmunk. Four tiny brown paws were buried in Whiteflower's white and golden fur. *Silverkit! These kits will have interesting warrior names.*

"They are wonderful!" Brightsun purred. The tiny she-kit mewed.

"Doesn't she look like you?" Whiteflower purred and licked Goldkit's head. Brightsun rubbed her muzzle against her mother's.

"Congrats on becoming the deputy. I'm proud of you. I am proud of you and your other siblings," Whiteflower mewed sadly. She yawned. Brightsun couldn't help thinking of the dream she had. Was it even real?

"Goodnight mother," Brightsun meowed and left the nursery. As she was leaving, Dragonflight was entering. He rubbed his pelt against his old mentor as he disappeared in the reeds. I should ask Flamestar if Dragonflight can mentor one of the kits. Brightsun thought with a smile.

Her mind floated off to the dream she had last night. *What was that about?*

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The Scent Of Death

[image]

The moon was full and bright in the sky. Brightsun was at Flamestar's side as they made their way to the island for the gathering.

It will be her first gathering as deputy, and it was her job to make sure all the cats made it across and to command the boats. She had been on a boat for the first time when Stormwhisker was still the deputy many moons ago.

The patrol reached the lake. Brightsun helped drag the hollow log to the water. She ordered the first group of cats to jump in.

She jumped in front of the boat while Flamestar stayed on the shore with the other group of senior warriors like Skyflight and Rainpuddle. Pebblepelt stayed behind to care for the injured warriors.

Brightsun helped paddle the boat with her large paws. Icepaw, Firepaw, and Shadowpaw were three of five apprentices in Fireclan. Chimepaw and Brownpaw volunteered to stay behind and help Pebblepelt gather herbs.

"Here, copy my moves." Brightsun meowed to the apprentices. They exchanged glances and then leaned over the log's edge. They carefully copied Brightsun's moves as she churned her paws.

"Nice job you three!" Brightsun heard the apprentices purr with satisfaction and appraisal. As the log reached the shore, Brightsun ordered everyone to get out. She saw a familiar flash of white out of the corner of her right eye.

"Dragonflight, would you come with me on the way back for the second group?" Brightsun meowed. He nodded and jumped back in the boat. Brightsun always wondered why her father took one cat on the way to get the second group of cats. Brightsun learned that,

apparently, it was to help paddle on both sides.

Brightsun pushed the log into the water and jumped aboard. She and her old apprentice paddled on both sides of the log until they reached the other side.

"Everyone hop aboard!" Brightsun commanded. Dragonflight stepped back to let Flamestar in the front beside his deputy. Two warriors pushed the back of the log and jumped in. They were halfway across the lake when Brightsun saw something large move underwater.

"Halt!" She yowled. All the warriors paddling suddenly stopped. Flamestar peeked over the edge of the log.

"Why did we stop?" Flamestar asked her. She flicked her whiskers and dipped her tail in the water and swished it side to side. The cats were all silent as they watched the golden warrior carefully.

Again, she saw movement. A large, familiar shape swam underneath the log.

"Everyone to the middle of the log! Hurry!" She commanded as a loud splash sounded from the water followed by a menacing hiss. The cats on the log hissed back.

"Alligator!" Dragonflight hissed, his tail fluffed up twice Its size.

"Who here is a good swimmer?" Flamestar meowed. Brightsun stepped forward.

He wants to lure the alligator away while the other cats paddle to safety. Brightsum realized. If we fail to lead it away, every cat here on this log can die. I rather die and my clanmates get to safety than live and watch many others lose their lives.

Dragonflight hesitated for what seemed like nine lifetimes before stepping up as well.

"Brightsun and Dragonflight, I will also come to lead the alligator away. Just follow me. The rest of you will paddle to safety the moment we leave!" Flamestar watched carefully as the alligator

swam to the other side of the log.

"Now!" Flamestar dove into the water followed by the two warriors. Icy cold waves gripped Brightsun as she splashed below the surface. Brightsun opened her eyes to see Dragonflight following Flamestar in the murky water. She quickly darted through the water like a fish.

Brightsun and Dragonflight were the best swimmers and underwater fighters in all the clans. Together, they could potentially lead the alligator away themselves, but Flamestar was persistent to defend his clan and come along.

Brightsun looked back to see eerie red eyes staring back at her. She swam faster back to the surface of the water to take a long breath of air. Her head broke the water and she heard the anxious yowls of about sixty or seventy different cats.

Brightsun dove back underwater. The alligator was following Flamestar, who was by far the slowest swimmer of the three cats. The alligator opened his jaws to reveal crooked, sharp teeth. Brightsun darted behind the alligator. She dug her long overgrown fangs into the reptile's tail, penetrating its skin. The alligator's snarl sounded as if ten cats were hissing at once.

The alligator snapped at Brightsun and grabbed the end of her tail. Brightsun snarled and dug at the reptile's eyes. Brightsun felt her tail being torn.

A flash of red and white launched themselves on the alligator. The alligator released its grip on her tail and turned sharply around to bite the closest cat on the neck. Brightsun heard a pain-filled yowl through the water. NO! The plan is going all wrong!

Brightsun dug her long claws deeper into both the alligator's eyes. It hissed and trashed to shake her off. The silhouette of a cat was floating in the water, dead. The surviving cat bit its scruff and dragged it to the surface. Now it was one cat against a giant alligator, and Brightsun was running out of air.

~*~

A strange feeling overtook Brightsun. A vision took her away from reality. She was once again in the eyes of another golden cat. This time, he was almost entirely black with a few specks of gold. He was wrestling a young alligator underwater. The lizard had tried to drag a kit under, but he charged in front of the helpless kit and the alligator pulled him under instead. He could hear voices calling out his name.

"Duskwing! Hurry!" The trembling voice of a panicked she-cat pierced the water. Many other yowls of clanmates swirled above him. Bubbles of air escaped from his nose and mouth. His chest felt as if it were collapsing as he desperately held on the alligator's scales.

I can't lose! I...can't...Lilystep..... Duskwing shivered and let go of the reptile's scales.

He tried one last time to breathe, but only water cascaded around him, pulling him down into the depths of the swamp.

The cry from his love echoed into the sky as the gleam of the alligator's sharp teeth flickered in front of him before cold darkness surrounded him.

~*~

Brightsun had lost her grip during her vision and the alligator started snapping its jaws randomly, unable to see.

Forget the alligator, I need air, or I'll drown just like Duskwing! Brightsun darted to the surface with the little strength she had left. Her head broke the surface and she took a huge gulp of air.

"Brightsun! Over here!" Brightsun heard a familiar voice over the many concerned yowling of cats.

She swam over to the voice absentmindedly, still shook from her close brush against death. Her paws touched the sand and she felt something rasp her ears and head.

"Oh, Brightsun, you're okay!" It was Dragonflight. He rubbed his muzzle against hers. She was snapped back to reality.

"Are you hurt? Where is Flamestar?" She asked. Dragonflight looked down at his paws.

"He lost another life. I'm sorry I had to leave you to face the alligator alone, I had to help Flamestar! He would have drowned once he woke up!" Dragonflight cried. Brightsun purred and touched his nose with hers.

"You did the right thing. I forgive you." Brightsun purred. Flamestar has only one life left. How long will it last?

Brightsun saw the log she was on approach land safely. Dragonflight purred and walked with Brightsun to the great oak tree in the center of the island. Cats were staring at them as if they didn't believe they fought an alligator and lived.

Brigthsun sat at the base of the oak tree along with two other warriors. One of them was an impossibly beautiful white she-cat with green eyes. Fresh wounds lined her face and pelt from long claws. She glared at Brightsun with the rage of a swarm of wasps. It has to be her, the cat that killed Lionfur.

The other cat was a familiar black cat. He tried his best to keep a stoic face but failed when Brightsun mewed a greeting to him. His face lit up with surprise.

"Brightpaw?" The black cat mewed. Brightsun shook her head.

"I'm now Brightsun. How are you doing?" She purred with amusement.

"Great! I'm the new deputy of Waterclan! Also, my name is Crowheart now! By the way, can you meet me at the border three days from now?" He whispered to Brightsun. The white cat yawned loudly before she could respond.

"Can you two stop talking like friends to each other? We are all enemies here, and we should act like it." The white cat said smugly while licking her paws and glaring at Brightsun.

"Well then, allow me to oblige," Brightsun said calmly before suddenly standing up and hissing at the white cat and unsheathing

her sharp overgrown claws and baring her long fangs.

The white cat's confident green eyes turned into terrified ones as she quickly backed away, her fur on end.

Brightsun spat one last time before settling down and looking straight ahead in front of her, hiding any emotions she felt. The white she-cat was dumbfounded. Before she could respond to Brightsun, a rather weak yowl sounded above them.

The three leaders took their place and sat next to each other. Honeystar stood up straight next to Flamestar, passing him short glances of hatred. Eaglestar nodded for Flamestar to start once every cat had gathered around.

"We are gathered here today under a full moon and a full sky of stars. I will go ahead and start with good news. New warriors have been named, new kits have entered our clan, we have new apprentices, a new deputy, and a new wonderful medicine cat-"

"Well, goodness! Looks like somebody has been a little busy! What now, another battle to kill off these new roles? Sheesh, I would be more careful if I were you, Flamestar! Perhaps you are getting too old to lead a clan now? Everyone. Is. *Dying!*" Honeystar interrupted, speaking in a somewhat happy, psychotic tone. Forestclan yowled in agreement while Fireclan began to protest. Eaglestar looked at Flamestar, awaiting a furious response. Flamestar looked at Honeystar with fury.

"Maybe you are the one who should be more careful. A patrol was at the border, yes, but they were on Fireclan's side and did nothing to offend you. Your patrol attacked us!" Flamestar growled. Honeystar laughed.

"Yeah yeah, but one of your warriors killed my deputy! Why would they do that? There was no need!" Honeystar yowled dramatically. Forestclan copied his pitiful cry. The she-cat next to Brightsun backed up from her before adding her own comment pointing her tail at the golden cat next to her.

"It was she who killed my father! She killed Sharpfang!" The she-cat

yowled with real grief but added her own dramatic voice. Brightsun couldn't help but flinch a little as different shades of eyes looked at her.

Brightsun remained seated with her fur still wet and matted. The nick in her tail still had an alligator tooth lodged in it. Small red beads continuously trickled into a puddle below her. Honeystar looked down, almost instantly recognizing her. His eyes said everything; *How DARE you!* The white she-cat pretended to cry as she sank to the ground. *Pfft. What a pathetic choice for a new deputy, your highness.* Brightsun thought with anger. She flicked her tail as if she was dismissing cats to go on patrol.

"Don't you know? You attacked us first. Let me ask you, do you know how to count? Let's see, you first killed my sister, a medicine cat apprentice. Oh, and just take a guess who killed her? Your old deputy, Sharpfang!" Cats around the clearing looked on in astonishment as if they couldn't believe anybody would do such a thing. Honeystar flicked his tail nervously, perhaps realizing he was messing with the wrong cat.

"Next, you killed our old deputy and my father, Stormwhisker. Oh, how can I forget my first mentor Nightfrost? I just started training at the time! A while later you attacked us again! This time, five of our warriors died including the newest deputy, my own brother! Just guess who killed him this time!" Brightsun whipped around and snarled at the white she-cat, who was still on the ground. Her pretty green eyes filled with sorrow and grief, but also fury and regret.

Brightsun was standing now and she turned around to glare at Honeystar himself. Crowheart backed away out of respect and amazement. Brightsun spat furiously at Honeystar, looking at him right in his stupid face.

"Don't think I forgot about you, murderer! You killed another one of our deputies and my next mentor, Willowfog! You attacked us at the border with your so-called 'patrol'. Why in the world would a patrol have an entire battalion of cats instead of two or three?" Brightsun's claws were now unsheathed, unable to hold herself together any longer. Her own clan looked uneasily at her. Even

Dragonflight looked at her with fear and admiration. Honeystar raised his head and snarled.

"You don't know I killed her! I wasn't even in that fight!" Honeystar yowled in desperation, trying his best to defend himself. Brightsun was not having it.

"You were also there. I know you were. You fought me, for goodness sake! And we even have a witness!" Brightsun yowled back.

"Prove it then! Who is it?" Honeystar's fur was standing on end. Brightsun looked around the clearing and beckoned her tail to a fluffy red apprentice.

"Firepaw," Brightsun said loud enough for the red cat to hear her. He nervously padded over to his deputy with his head and tail high but shrank once he was under Honeystar's gaze. "Tell them," Brightsun ordered.

The apprentice looked at Honeystar with grief and stood up again.

"I was there! You killed my mother! I saw it!" Firepaw yowled. Honeystar was about to lose it.

"Liar! *LIAR!* You have no proof but words!" Flamestar was the one to speak next.

"You are the only cat in this whole lake with golden brown fur. And in between my mate's claws was golden brown fur just like yours. You are guilty Honeystar. You accused us of trespassing, and we denied it. Your response was to attack us and kill our warriors, deputies, and medicine cat apprentice! One death in your clan and you dare try to shame us? It is you who should be ashamed!"

Honeystar yowled with fury and lunged at Flamestar. The two cats fell out of the tree they were in onto the floor. Eaglestar jumped down.

"Honeystar, you fool! There is a truce! Stop fighting NOW!" Eaglestar yelped desperately, unable to stop the fight. All the cats backed away, hissing at each other.

Waterclan stayed at the corners on the island while the other two clans cheered their leaders on. Thunder rolled in the distance and wind howled over the gathered cats. The star covered sky was slowly disappearing as the storm got closer.

Brightsun was on Fireclan's side, trying to decide if she should help. *No! If I attack Honeystar, a full-blown battle might occur! I have to let Flamestar settle this by himself, no matter what happens.* No cat dared to interfere with the two leaders. Flamestar was on the defense, trying to shield his throat. Honeystar was desperately trying to grab him but had no luck.

The two felines chased each other into the water. Honeystar dragged Flamestar underneath the surface, knowing how weak he was at swimming. The cats disappeared under the black water. The wind made rough ripples on the surface, making it impossible to see.

Brightsun and the white she-cat pushed their way to the front. Fireclan moved out of Brightsun's way while the white she-cat had to jump over her clanmates.

"Get back!" Brightsun yowled as loud as she could at Fireclan. The white she-cat repeated Brightsun's order to Forestclan and both clans shifted back to the center of the island.

The cats became more and more silent as the storm got ever closer. The rain started pouring down and thunder illuminated the water. All of the cats held their breath, waiting for the leaders to emerge. *Flamestar, please be okay.*

At last, a cat arose from the lake. One ear was torn but he appeared to be fine. The cat stood tall and proud with his tail up. He yowled his victory as he stepped onto land. Just as he did so, lightning flashed across the sky.

Brightsun felt as if the lightning struck her. Golden brown fur. Brightsun screeched with fear and rushed to the water.

Honeystar noticed her and grabbed her with his claws.Brightsun reacted instantly and blindly slashed her right paw with unsheathed

claws. She felt her soft pads dig past fur into skin. She felt Honeystar let her go and collapsed on the ground with a choking sound.

Brightsun rushed to the water and dove in without hesitation. Her mind was blank as she raced to the bottom of the lake. Her eyes adjusted to the darkness and she was able to see a red figure resting on sunken branches and reeds.

She grabbed Flamestar's scruff and swam back to the surface. Her head rose above the surface as she dragged Flamestar on the shore.

"Wake up! *Wake up!* Come on!" Brightsun nudged Flamestar's motionless body. Firepaw rushed to her side and started licking his father's face, trying to wake him up.

Fireclan hurriedly began to gather around them. All hostility between the two clans was gone, for now. Firepaw began to whimper and curled up next to the motionless leader. Brightsun brushed the red cat's pelt with her tail, for she remembered what it felt like to lose Stormwhisker.

Fireclan gathered around in silent grief. Pebblepelt rushed to Flamestar and placed a paw on his chest. She looked up at Brightsun with grief. She sat next to her friend. Rainpuddle also came and sat next to them.

Honeystar was surrounded by his clan. He got up, coughing up water. He glared at Brightsun along with the white she-cat. He smiled while baring his fangs. He waved his tail in dismissal and led the way to their territory.

Some of the Forestclan cats looked at Brightsun with regret while others looked on with anger. Honeystar had lost a life, but Brightsun had no clue how many he had left. Eaglestar jumped back on the oak tree with an emotionless expression.

"This gathering is over."

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As the Fireclan cats reached their camp, their clanmates greeted

them happily upon their return, unknowing of what happened at the gathering.

The rain was still pouring down but the lightning had stopped. Brightsun slowly made her way to the cypress tree and jumped on Flamestar's perch.

She did not bother summoning the clan, for they had all heard the news already and were gathered around. The waterfall near the camp seemed silent over the drumming of the rain.

Not a breath can be heard from the swamp. Darkness surrounded the camp without the light of the full moon. Brightsun waited for Pebblepelt to take her usual place at the tree.

"Cats of Fireclan, we come back from the gathering with horrifying news. First, on our way to the island, our log was attacked by an alligator." The clan gasped with fear. Brightsun lifted her tail to show the alligator tooth, a fearsome scar that would forever be a part of her.

"Dragonflight, Flamestar, and I guided the alligator away from the log, but Flamestar lost a life when the alligator bit him." Brightsun paused as wails of grief filled the clearing.

"Afterwards, it was a normal gathering, until Honeystar pointed out that we had recently killed his deputy!" Hisses and snarls erupted from the clan.

"That's not all. He did it in the most dramatic way possible, trying to make our leader look like a murderer! I decided to step in and point out everything he did, and how many cats his clan killed. Once I proved him wrong, he attacked Flamestar and drowned him... and he lost his last life." The clan yowled their grief for their lost leader.

"Although he has lost his last life, he has served his clan and led us through war. He was wise in his decisions, and defended us to the very end! Let his soul rest with Starclan. Tomorrow night, I shall journey to the mooncircle and await Starclan's approval of me. As of now, the threat of Forestclan is still our priority. We need

sentries to guard the camp from here to dawn. Would anybody like to volunteer?" Many voices rose from the clearing with Firepaw being the loudest.

"Firepaw, Rainpuddle, and Robinfeather will stay here to guard the camp. Their duty will be relieved at dawn. In the morning, I want no hunting patrols. I want all our warriors and apprentices to be on the lookout at Forestclan border. Waterclan will most likely do us no harm, but I will send one patrol over at sunhigh just in case. I will organize patrols in the morning. First, we must pay our respects to Flamestar."

***

The sun was finally starting to set. Brightsun was walking through the swamp. The rain has stopped falling, but the blue sky was hidden by gray clouds. The morning air was chilly and the water was cold. Fish have taken shelter and the bugs have stopped playing. Fewer birds were singing than normal.

Brightsun has grown a thick pelt, making her appear even bigger than she already was. Pebblepelt was right behind her, keeping a lookout. Brightsun was heading to the lakeshore with the logs. Once the two cats reached there, they pushed a log into the water and jumped in. Instead of going straight to the island, they turned the log to the left.

A wide-open expanse of water opened up once they passed the trees. The moon's reflection painted the water. Their fur looked silver in the light of the moon. Pebblepelt pointed her muzzle to a very small island, not even half the size of the gathering island. A large circle of rocks surrounded a small pool of water. A large lily pad grew in the center of the pool.

"There it is. The mooncircle," Pebblepelt whispered to her friend. Brightsun had to squint her eyes to see. The moonlight's reflection from the pool was surrounded by stars, more than the sky above it. *How is that possible?*

Eventually, the log hit the shore and Pebblepelt jumped out and Brightsun followed. The sky was clear tonight, and you can see

every single star. They glittered brightly in the darkness. Pebblepelt sat at the pool's edge and looked at the water.

"Isn't it exquisite? There isn't anything like it anywhere else!" Pebblepelt whispered with excitement.

"It truly is," Brightsun agreed.

"You need to jump on the lily pad in the center, drink the water, and then go to sleep. There, you will meet with Starclan. One more thing! Once you get on, we must not talk out loud!" Pebblepelt instructed.

Brightsun nodded and lightly jumped over the pool. She landed lightly on the pad, barely making a ripple. She looked down at the star-speckled water. The tiny white lights were so bright that Brightsun couldn't even see her own reflection.

She lapped up the water. It wasn't cold, nor was it hot. For a second Brightsun did not know if she was even drinking anything. The water was completely tasteless.

The golden cat curled up on the soft lily and closed her eyes and waited for Starclan.

~*~

Part Two - Broken Borders

[image]

FIRECLAN

Leader

Flamestar - A deep red tom with warm brown eyes. Scar on neck and ripped left ear.

Deputy

Brightsun - Fearsome long-furred golden tabby with golden eyes. Has overgrown claws and teeth. Long scar across her left eye.

Medicine Cat

Pebblepelt - Clever brown she-cat with spots the color of river stones.

Warriors

Stagleap - Handsome brown tom with a white underbelly and white spots on back. Brown eyes.

Cloudstorm - Blue tom with blue eyes.

Rainpuddle - Longhair silver tabby with striking blue eyes. The tufts on her ears are unusually long.

Apprentice; Snowpaw

Firetail - Fluffy, long-furred ginger tabby tom with brown eyes. Scar over back.

Icefoot - Pale white tom with one blue one brown eye.

Chimesong - light brown tabby she-cat with brown eyes.

Shadowshade - Pure black tom with strange black eyes Scars all over body and a snapped tail.

Dragonflight - A small, fluffy white tom with blazing yellow eyes.

Robinfeather - A small, short-haired white tom with a red underbelly and yellow eyes.

Apprentices

Snowpaw - Pretty white she-cat with golden paws and gold flecks on her face. Yellow eyes. Mentor; Rainpuddle.

Queens

Whiteflower - Beautiful white she-cat with golden spots and blue eyes. Mother of Goldkit, Silverkit, and Bronzekit.

Elders

Swanwing - Pretty white she-cat with pale yellow eyes.

Mistygaze - Grey she-cat with silver eyes.

Eaglefeather - Brown tom with a white underbelly and yellow eyes.

Swanwing - Pretty white she-cat with pale yellow eyes.

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WATERCLAN

Leader

Eaglestar - Elderly long-furred black cat with white underbelly, chest, and paws. Green eyes.

Deputy

Tinyspeck - Elderly black she-cat with a bobbed tail and blue eyes.

Medicine Cats

Fireflight - Black she-cat with unusual red splotches and amber eyes.

Apprentices

Crowpaw - Tall, pure black long-furred tom with icy blue eyes.

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FORESTCLAN

Leader

Honeystar - A short, stocky honey-brown tom with greenish-amber

Deputy

Sharpfang - Tall, battle-scarred white tom with green eyes.

Medicine Cats

Fernnose - Brown tom with green eyes.

Twelve Fallen Stars

[image]

Brightsun opened her eyes. She was standing up and looking at a beautiful silent waterfall. Blue sparks of light drifter around a blue landscape filled with water and trees. Brightsun tried to move, but couldn't.

The stars twinkled in the sky brighter and brighter until they appeared to descend upon her. Slowly, frosty fur and paws glittered in fog-like illuminance.

"Welcome." All the stars seem to speak at once. Brightsun's fur stood on end. Something about her dream felt familiar. The judging eyes of Starclan rested upon her shoulders. Soft muttering cascaded around the landscape like a river cutting through ice. She should feel at peace here, why does she feel troubled and disturbed?

The stars glittered in front of her. Her paws tingled at the sight of her former clanmates. Flamestar, Willowfog, Nightfrost, everyone was here. Her heart leapt as she saw two glittering pelts. One was pure gold and the other was brownish-pink like a rose.

"Lionfur? Rosepaw?" Brightsun choked. She couldn't believe her siblings were standing right in front of her. Rosepaw was still the size of a six moon old kit. It made Brightsun want to run straight up to her and groom her glittery fur, but she knew better. Lionfur looked sad and nervous.

"Welcome, Brightsun!" Flamestar purred. "You have come so far. You fought rival clans and defended your clan at the gathering. You fought an alligator to save your frightened clanmates. You trained up a brilliant white warrior to be as courageous as you. It will be an honor to grant you nine lives of a leader." Flamestar bowed his head with the rest of the cats in Starclan. Some Starclan cats appeared to be uneasy.

Brightsun felt something drift away from her. It was her old life.

The cats were taking away her current life to give her nine new ones.

"May I give her her first life?" A deep voice rumbled. He glided out from the ranks of Starclan in the form of a strong rain-colored warrior.

It took a moment for Brightsun to recognize him. It was Stormwisker. Her dear father, the cat that died at the same battle as Rosepaw's death. The two cats embraced for a wonderful moment.

"Look at you. I never expected to become a leader myself. I was afraid, yet you took charge as if it were nothing. It takes a strong mind to lead a clan." Stormwhisker purred and touched his daughter's head with his nose.

"With this life, I give you valor to protect the ones you love and care about. The courage of a true warrior flows through you." Brightsun felt her claws and teeth tingle.

She was pulled into a vision. She was fighting a brown warrior. Her blue paws reached out at her attacker, but the opponent found an opening in her defenses and landed a mighty blow to her chest. Pain seared through her body until darkness surrounded her.

Brightsun jolted back to reality. She somehow wasn't surprised by the sudden vision. Her father gave her a friendly smile and walked back uneasily to the line of divine cats.

The next warrior to step up was Nightfrost. His eye was still missing, but he walked with confidence as if he could see right through it. She was much bigger than her old mentor.

"My apprentice, I am amazed by how much of a warrior you have become. You even passed on my knowledge to dear Dragonflight. He does indeed remind me of you!" Nightfrost's eyes twinkled with pride. He touched Brightsun's head with his nose just like Stormwhisker did.

"With this life, I give you pride. Be proud of who you are, and never let anybody stand in your way to tell you what's wrong and what's

right."

Another vision struck her. This time, she only saw from one eye. A small golden apprentice darted across the swamp bringing down prey with ease and riding lily pads with grace.

Nightfrost backed off to let a pretty white cat pad up to Brightsun. It was Willowfog. She didn't say anything, but her eyes said everything. She did the same ritual as the two cats before her and put her nose up to

Brightsun's head.

"With this life, I give you vitality. In a fight, you must be fast. Strike first and remember to watch your back."

The next vision was by far the longest and from the point of view of a foggy white cat. She was fighting with speed and grace until something behind her sunk its claws into her scruff. She withered on the ground for what felt like an hour before her vision faded.

"Goodluck," Willowfog whispered quietly and padded away. Brightsun looked around for the next cat. Hisses suddenly surrounded the area, interrupting the peaceful scene.

"That's a cat from the Dark Swamp! How did he get here?" Snarls and insults were thrown at a piebald brown tom. His face was scarred and his fur seemed tangled. The most horrifying thing of all was his exposed, bloody throat. His head was low and his shoulders were scarred.

Brightsun unsheathed her claws. It was a cat she hadn't met before, but those eyes... green eyes that are all too familiar. This cat had to be related to Sharpfang, the tom who killed Rosepaw.

"What do you want? You are interrupting a ritual!" Brightsun spat. The tom's tail was in between his legs. He looked just like a senior apprentice and was much smaller than Brightsun, and shuddered at the sight of her long claws. The same claws that killed his kin.

"My name is Ivyheart, and I came to warn you!" He exclaimed

"How did you get out of the Dark Swamp?" Flamestar snarled.

"I-I don't know! I just appeared here after thinking about it! I was running away from something in the forest and I just appeared here!" Ivyheart whimpered. His cries made Brightsun reconsider. A cat escaped the Dark Swamp to warn me? But... of what?

"What do you want to warn me about?" Brightsun huffed. She was intrigued to know.

"They are trying to disturb the ritual! They are-" Just as he was about to speak more, the ground shook. The sky started falling apart. Starclan cats disappeared from Brightsun's view.

The anxious yowls of the cats disappeared, leaving Brightsun and Ivyheart alone in the darkness. Dark willow trees loomed around them.

"Not here! *NO!*" Ivyheart whimpered.

"What's happening?" Brightsun growled. Shapes of large cats darted in between the trees. Howls of laughter cut the static air. They jumped out of the trees in front of the two cats. Ivyheart yelped and bowed to the ground so low that his head was touching the ground.

"Who are they?" Brightsun snarled.

"They are the rulers of the dark swamp!" He cried and buried his scarred face in his paws.

These cats were as big if not bigger than Brightsun. Each one had golden eyes and fur and were covered in various scars. Some had a missing eye, some had missing limbs or ears, but every single one of them had a long scar across their left eye. They were all covered in blood.

The largest of what appears to be about twelve different cats stepped forward. Her snarl was vicious and blood-thirsty. She was nearly identical to Brightsun with the same shade of golden fur. The only difference was the stripe pattern along her back and the cruel look on the stranger's face.

"Brightstar," She smiled, showing off her saber-tooth-like fangs. Even with her mouth closed, they hung out about two inches. Even her claws can't be retracted.

"Don't call me that! You have no right! Who are you?" Brightsun spat. She wasn't finished with her ritual! Her back was arched and she splayed her tail to show the alligator's tooth lodged in her bone in an attempt to imitate her foes, but it wasn't any use, and only a single blackish-gold tom flinched at the sight of the tooth.

These cats didn't fear her, and she felt as if she shouldn't be scared of them. In fact, one of the healthiest looking cats from the crowd was a young male. He was missing his left ear and his right front leg was broken in an eternal limp. His eyes were also gold, but something about him was good. Perhaps it was the way he was looking at Brightsun... with pity.

"Why, I'm you. We are all you!" The large cat laughed. A chorus of laughter filled the forest. Ivyheart wouldn't dare look up, but his ears were perked.

"How can I be you?" Brightsun hissed. The big cat yawned as if she had told many other cats before.

"Starclan did it to pay the price of a crime I committed. I am you. The original. I'm the feline you hear in the legends. The one you fear. I am Sunstar!"

"To Starclan with it! You are not me, and I'm not you!" With a mighty yowl, Brightsun lunged at the larger cat with blinding speed. She unsheathed her claws and bared her fangs. Sunstar snickered and stepped aside. Brightsun flashed her claws to the side, but Sunstar dodged again. And again... and again.

Sunstar extended her paw and slashed Brightsun on the side. Pain scorched through her. She was sent sprawling away into the dirt. The Dark Swamp itself seemed to laugh at her.

"Over and over again I fought you, do you really think you can beat yourself?" Sunstar mocked. Brightsun looked at her side where Sunstar had stuck her. Nothing was there, but the pain was.

Brightsun charged again and unleashed a flurry of attacks. Sunstar moved aside with ease. She couldn't even scrape her fur. *How do I beat an opponent who already knows what I'm about to do?* Suddenly an idea hit her. *She doesn't know my new moves!*

Brightsun faked an attack. Sunstar dodged it and backed away from her, leaving her chest and face into view. While her guard was down, Brightsun yowled and barreled Sunstar over, pinning her down.

Before Sunstar recovered, Brightsun scratched her face. Sunstar yowled with pain and fury. No scratch marks appeared on her face, but the shrieks told Brightsun she was doing her job. Sunstar kicked Brightsun off with her back legs and stood up panting.

"You really are one of us, Brightstar. You are worthy of Dawnstripe's prophecy, the only life we lived as a medicine cat. She is the most powerful of us all. She possessed powers even Starclan fears. In fact, she can see the future at will! I think you already know who she is and how she died. Starclan was so afraid of her that they sent a rattlesnake to kill her! Curse them!" Sunstar hissed and stepped back to let a ragged medicine cat through.

Her left eye had yet another scar over it and was milky white, a sign of blindness. Her golden-brown fur had many black stripes like a tiger. Her fluffy pelt stuck out in spikes Brightsun shivered when the she-cat looked at her. Dawnstripe was decorated with bones and feathers of prey. She had a crown made of cat's teeth and claws. Two small deer antlers were on her head. It was the legendary bone crown that was mounted in the medicine cat's den.

Yes, Brightsun had a feeling she knew this cat. The sound of a rattle crackled in the back of her mind. Dawstripe sat down. Fog surrounded her, leaving only her faint gold eye glowing through. Her voice sounded like snakes slithering through grass.

The darkest night and the brightest moon

Brings dread across the gloom

Two powerful leaders stand to fight

Yowls of battle fill the night

Unless the golden one kills a deathly soul

They will not reach their goal

If they fail, they will not reach the light

And live once again, another tragic life

Dawnstripe's raspy voice hung over the swamp, sending the murky black water into flickering ripples. The forest was dead silent once the ringing faded.

"We just want to help you, Brightstar. We want freedom. Starclan punished all of us, no matter what life we lived. In fact, the life before you only did good. Poor Leopardshine died after saving his leader and broke his leg before he perished. He never did anything wrong and he was kind. He was strong and nimble, but Starclan doesn't want just one clan saved. They demanded the entire wetland be saved! Leoparshine deserved Starclan! *How dare they!*" Sunstar spat.

"I know your story, Sunstar. You almost destroyed the wetlands with your greed, and if we really are the same cat, maybe Starclan was afraid of us. Why should I help you after all the destruction you caused?" Brightsun snarled. Sunstar looked as if she was staring at a pile of dead fish.

"Because if you don't save the wetlands, you will end up here too. It's unfair, isn't it? You live a life completely unaware of your past mistakes. How are we supposed to fix them if we don't know about them?" Sunstar crooned. *She has a point. How would we know of our destiny?* Starclan is in the wrong about that one.

"I don't know how to help the wetlands. In fact, Waterclan is smart enough to keep their noses out of our business!" Brightsun said.

"Actually, the least Starclan does for us is reincarnate us when an opportunity reveals itself. You have a lovely opportunity, you! I have a feeling I know what the prophecy means. I need you to kill Honeystar for us!" Sunstar stood up and flexed her claws.

"He is like me, he wants to take over the wetlands and keep it for himself. Besides, he has two lives left! After roaming the Dark Swamp for so long, I have seen the error of my ways. It is useless to rule one united clan founded by blood. There will be no more wars, yeah? Oh, it's also the will of Starclan, I should've mentioned that."

"I see now, but what about the nine lives ritual? I only received three!" Brightsun growled, shuffling her paws.

"It was the only way I could reach you. My spirit is fading away, and I had only one chance, and after today I will no longer be able to reach you again. Fail this life, and we may never break free. I am forever a part of you. We are all a part of you. Use your knowledge to your advantage!" Sunstar yowled and ran towards Brightsun.

She stood her ground, waiting for the large cat to strike first. She was surprised when Sunstar transformed into a golden mist. The other eleven cats charged after her, all disintegrating and hiding in Brightsun's golden fur. The swamp was completely quiet. The prophecy Dawnstripe spoke of echoed in her head.

"Are they gone?" Ivyheart whimpered. Brightsun had completely forgotten he was there.

"Yes, they are gone."

"Is there anything I can do to help you? I heard everything. Starclan can be cruel." He said and looked at his paws.

"They sent me here in fear that I will act like my leader, Honeystar. I killed a cat after he ordered me to, I would never disobey orders, it is the will of Starclan, yet they threw me in this smelly swamp!"

"A cat shouldn't be judged on orders they take. You were doing the right thing. Besides, what can you do for me? You are stuck here, how can you help?" Brightsun sighed.

"I-I know a way but at the cost of my soul. It's a secret within Forestclan." Ivyheart whispered.

"Why would you give up your soul to me?" Brightsun snapped before Ivyheart could explain himself. "I killed cats from your clan!

Why would you help me?"

"Because I don't want to be trapped in this forest anymore!" Ivyheart yelled over Brightsun. She stopped talking, stunned.

"Why does it cost your soul? What can you even do?"

"I can give you another life. It's a blessing that the cats of the Dark Swamp managed to create. I can combine my strength with yours. Anything to release you and your past spirits from this deadly cycle. My physical body will cease to exist, but my soul lives on within you!" Ivyheart turned away from her, sniffling. He's scared. Brightsun realized. She softly brushed her pelt against his.

"You really don't have to do that," Brightsun purred.

"I want to, I really do! I have nothing ahead of me but misery and shame. I know you will take good care of my soul, for it will become your own!" Ivyheart looked at Brightsun in her golden eyes. His own green eyes were filled with determination and hope.

He stood up taller and touched Brightsun's nose with his own.

"I give my soul to Brightstar. Let my strength, knowledge, and thoughts pass on to her. With this life, I give you hope. Hope for the future that will come. Hope for all cats in the Dark Swamp. Hope for all future generations and ever-lasting peace!" Ivyheart announced loud and proud.

Brightsun felt a tear trickle down her face as Ivyheart's body vaporized into mist and settled into her fur. For a moment it was silent but then, from far above her, a voice rang out.

"Brightsun!"

"Brightsun!"

"Brightsun wake up!"

~*~

Brightsun jolted awake. Pebblepelt was on the lilypad with her and

was nudging her with her paws. The medicine cat's eyes lit up with relief and joy.

"You're awake!" She cried and sank to her knees.

"I'm awake," Brightsun purred.

"What happened? The moon was covered with a thunderstorm, the wind picked up, the water wasn't moving despite the wind and-and..." Pebblepelt stammered. Tears were pouring down from her eyes like waterfalls.

"Hey, I'm fine. It's just-" Brightsun paused. *I should tell her what happened. Everything... except maybe Ivyheart.*

"What I'm about to tell you, you must swear to Starclan not to tell anybody. Not a single soul must hear what I say." Brightsun whispered.

"I swear to Starclan not to tell a single soul," Pepplepelt swore.

"Okay, listen up carefully, because I'm only going to say it once.

Brightsun told her friend everything. She left out the part about Ivyheart but told her about her past lives and how she only has four lives instead of nine.

"That's awful! I can't believe that the ritual was interrupted, it never happened before! And Sunstar told you to kill Honeystar before he takes over the Wetlands? Is it really the only way to break the cycle?"

"I'm afraid so, Pebblepelt. We have to declare war on them before it's too late. Let's run back to camp and stop at nothing!"

***

Paws were pounding the mud as the two she-cats ran back to camp. They entered the clearing at daylight.

Many cats were already out for dawn patrol and were greeting Brightsun and calling her by her new name....or at least it should

have been.

"Brightstar!" Dragonflight purred and rubbed his head with his old mentor. Brightsun decided that perhaps she should change her name. The ritual wasn't complete, but she was accepted by Starclan.

Her clan would also accept her. Besides, they shouldn't worry about her problems. She should solve them herself.

"I'm back, and I have duties to perform."

~~~
~~~

As A Leader

[image]

A full moon filled the sky with light. Thunderclouds that were darker than the night itself loomed over the island. Brightstar jumped out of the log and kneaded the sand with her paws.

It has been an entire moon since she became leader. Brightstar was ready to do whatever she needed to do to kill Honeystar and take away his two remaining lives. Fireclan flanked her, hissing at Forestclan.

Her mind drifted to Ivyheart, a former Forestclan cat. The poor tom gave up his soul to help her. Ever since then, she was faster, smarter, and stronger. Her claws now tear crevices in rocks she uses to sharpen them. She outran every one of her clanmates in races.

Not only are there physical differences, she is more careful with Forestclan, almost as if she knows their secrets. She has even taught herself new moves she has seen Forestclan cats use. They were suddenly very easy to mimic.

Eaglestar's fur was turning white and his bones could be seen as he walked up to his spot on the oak tree. Honeystar was glaring at Brightstar not only with hate but with uncertainty. Brightstar flicked her tail and released her clan. Her deputy, Rainpuddle, went to sit at the base of the tree.

Brightstar noticed Crowheart sitting with a stoic expression on his face, as usual. He was now fully grown and had the body of a strong warrior. He tried his best to keep a neutral face when Brightstar approached him.

"What's the matter? Cat got your tongue?" Brightstar mocked. Crowheart did his best not to respond. Brightstar gave Rainpuddle a look as if to say, watch this!

"No, you are not Crowheart. What happened to the mighty warrior

of Waterclan, the rulers of the grasslands? For sure he should be here by now! Say, random black cat, have you seen Crowheart anywhere?" Brightstar yawned. Crowheart was on the verge of laughing. He sighed.

"Do you need anything, Brightstar?" Crowheart smiled.

"Not really. Just wanted to tell you that I'm sorry, but I couldn't meet you at the last gathering or at the border to our clans." Brightstar hoped he would understand what she meant.

At the last gathering, she had promised to meet him at the border three days after, but a fight broke out and she had to travel to the mooncircle. She no longer had time for silly, sneaky meetings with another clan cat.

"Nah, that's fine. You had an excuse! You really fought an alligator, by the stars that's amazing!" Crowheart purred.

"Don't flatter me, featherbrain."

The she-cat from the last gathering was flicking her tail nervously while listening in on their conversation. Her green eyes glowed with anger. Brightstar had embarrassed Forestclan and they most definitely deserved it. Brightstar caught her eye for a moment, but she quickly looked away.

"What's your name?" Brightstar asked, trying to keep the growl out of her voice.

"Greenpetal, okay?" She growled and turned away again. Brightstar shrugged.

"See you later, Rainpuddle!" Brightstar purred and stalked off to the oak tree. With one mighty leap, she landed perfectly in her spot.

She gazed out into the crowd of cats. She had never been this high up on the island before. It was quite breathtaking. Finally, Eaglestar was the first to yowl. Her first gathering as a leader has begun.

"We are gathered here tonight to celebrate the full moon! I don't have much to report tonight, other than the sudden abundance of

prey. Which one of you would like to speak next?" The old tom looked between Brightstar and Honeystar.

"Well, I think Brightstar should go first tonight!" Honeystar said gleefully. All of the cats in the gathering looked shocked beyond their whiskers... except Forestclan.

"If you insist, Honeystar!" Brightstar said. Something was definitely wrong. Honeystar sounded too happy. "I have received my lives from Starclan, and I have chosen Rainpuddle as my deputy." Brightstar nodded to Honeystar to start. He fluffed his tail with excitement.

"Well, I have been thinking. We shouldn't fight anymore. Forestclan and Fireclan should be at peace! No more cats should die!" Honeystar decreed. Forestclan yowled their approval. Brightstar shuffled her paws.

"What makes you suddenly think you are off the hook from attacking our last leader at a gathering?" Brightstar said with a chilling tone. If Honeystar thought he could get off that easily, then she was not having it.

"Yes, that was my fault, but it won't happen again! And plus, I also lost a life that same night. A life for a life. I have only seven left, I'm sorry to say," Honeystar looked at the stars and his clan wailed with distress. Brightstar nearly spat accusations at him. *Seven? You have two! That's straight up mousedung!*

"Very well. I would rather have neutrality than linger on war forever," Brightstar said. Honeystar was hiding something. She was sure of it

"Thank you, Brightstar. The wetlands are now at peace!"

~*~

Fireclan celebrated Brightstar's return. They offered her a catfish, one of her favorite foods, but she refused. She instead groggily dragged herself inside her den and propped down in her little nest. The dream she had was... very strange.

That night Brightstar had yet another dream about another gold cat with many black spots dotting her pelt. Her large muscles flexed under her thick fur. Extra long tufts sprouted on her ears that all Fireclan cats have, and this time, she had long cheek fur that dripped from her face. Her small bobbed tail wagged with excitement.

"I smell catfish! Check the mud, everyone!" She purred to four other cats.

"Oh Lynxtail, you and your catfish!" A gray she-cat giggled. Her kind eyes sparkled as she hopped into the water, getting her white paws and chest wet.

"Spottedwing, you love food as much as me, I don't want to hear it!" Lynxtail chuffed before splashing into the cold water herself.

She sniffed the air again before following the unmistakable scent of catfish in deeper water. She swam through multiple bushes and brambles before reaching a small pathway.

The wind whistled through the autumn trees. As lynxtail walked brown and orange leaves crinkled under her huge paws.

As peaceful as the pathway was, something felt off. A weird stench filled her nostrils. It was unfamiliar to her. However, she was distracted by the fresh scent of catfish right ahead of her. She just needed to cross the pathway to the other side, dig in the mud, and the prize was hers!

Lynxtail began her stalk. The cloudy sky hid her shadow as she crept to the water on silent claws. Her belly fur whisked the ground as her long ears were tipped in the direction of the catfish, making sure it didn't move by listening for small clues.

Instead, her ears picked up another sound. There was a quiet rustling somewhere above her. It wasn't a bird or a squirrel, but something completely new. Something *large*.

Feeling a sudden dread, Lynxtail paused during her pursuit of the fish to listen closer to the strange sound.

Big mistake. A loud bang shook the sky.

The smell of ash surrounded her as a heavy force sent Lynxtail skidding to the ground. Her chest felt like it had been smashed by a log.

She didn't even have time to yowl before she collapsed, huge red beads slipped from her side.

She shuttered one last time, gritted her teeth, and welcomed the blackness that overtook her.

~~~

Moons have passed since the dream of Lynxtail's demise.

As it turns out, Brightstar was a great leader. Best of all, Forestclan has not been bothering Fireclan. They stayed on their borders and never dared to interfere with the hunters. Today, Brightstar was perched on the great cypress tree.

She was watching her mother groom two kits. They both seemed well behaved and they stood still. She could barely see Goldkit, but Bronzekit's white spots on his back stood out like a pile of snow in late Greenleaf.

Pebblepelt was in her spot with Silverpaw. His body was skinny and slick. He barely had any muscles compared to his siblings.

As the kits left the den, Brightstar held her breath as she watched Goldkit. A glittering golden pelt with the same dark stripes. The only difference was normal, short teeth and claws along with pretty brown eyes.

Did she look like this when she was a kit? And little Bronzekit looked just like Rosepaw beyond his four silver paws and white rump.

They stopped before the tree and looked up at their sister. They twitched nervously as if they couldn't believe they were related.

"Step forward," Brightstar instructed. They silently obeyed.
~~~

"Goldkit and Brozekit, you have both reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you two will be known as Goldpaw and Bronzepaw. Goldpaw, your mentor will be Dragonflight. I hope Dragonflight will pass down all he knows on to you." Brightstar turned to a stunned white warrior.

"Dragonflight, you are ready to take on your first apprentice. You have received excellent training from me, and you have shown yourself to be swift and fearless. You will be the mentor of Goldpaw, and I expect you to pass on all you know to Her." Goldpaw calmly padded up to Dragonflight, who was still frozen in place. They touched noses.

Brightstar scanned the clearing. I haven't thought about Bronzepaw! *I forgot that Rainfall is now the new deputy and still getting used to her position, she can't be his mentor now!*

"Bronzepaw, your mentor will be Firetail. I hope Firetail will pass down all he knows. Firetail, you are ready to take on your first apprentice. You have received excellent training from Mistygaze, and you have shown yourself to be bold and loyal. You will be the mentor of Bronzepaw, and I expect you to pass on all you know to Him." Firetail approached the new apprentice and touched noses. Silverpaw purred with pride.

"New mentors, if you so wish, you may take your apprentices on your next patrol around the territory. You are dismissed."

Brightstar leaped down from her perch. The morning patrol reported nothing but good news.

The morning air was cool and windy. The smell of fish filled the air as hunting patrols loaded the freshkill pile. Brightstar padded to the medicine cat's den.

Pebbleepelt and Silverpaw were cleaning some herbs. There was an injured warrior in their den, bitten by an unknown snake. The white deer antlers hung from the wall in the same place Dawnstripe had them. Brightstar shivered and looked away.

"Is Dovewing going to be okay?" Brightstar meowed. The white she-cat was asleep.

"Nothing fatal, she will be just fine," Pebblepelt purred. Sliverpaw looked up at his mentor.

"Were poppy seeds used for wounds or pain? I forgot again!" Silverpaw meowed. Brightstar looked at him with the utmost confusion. Suddenly startled, Silverpaw backed away from her with his ears down.

"Don't worry about Brightstar, she just makes that face sometimes!" Pebblebelt laughed.

"Is it that bad?" Brightstar huffed.

"Yes!" Silverpaw whimpered. Brightstar nudged the apprentice reassuringly.

"I didn't mean anything by it. Oh, and poppy seeds are for pain. The patient is supposed to chew them," Brightstar explained.

"Thank you, Brightstar," Silverpaw said before quickly trotting off.

"What was that about?" Brightstar smiled. Pebblepelt's pur echoed off the walls.

"He's skittish, but he makes a really good medicine cat! He was not made for fighting, the poor scrap of fur!"

"It's good to know my little brother is doing well. Keep up the good work!" Brightstar waved goodbye with her tail and stepped out in the sunlight.

Birds sang their morning song. Brightstar went on patrol with Rainpuddle, Dragonflight, and Goldpaw. Dragonflight and his new apprentice were talking together about swimming. Goldpaw shuttered at the word *water*.

Suddenly, a majestic cry rang out above them. All the cats froze. Brightstar's fur stood on end and her back arched. Something didn't feel right. She felt like she was in the air. She felt like she

was...falling.

Traitor

[image]

~*~

A great cry rattled his bones. Screams shook the clearing. Kits were running for cover and warriors were helping elders and queens.

"Flamekit, Stormkit, Stagkit, come here!" A gray tabby queen shouted over the chaos for her kits. Three small balls of fur sprinted across the clearing guided by a young one-eyed black warrior safely into the nursery.

"Where is Whitekit? She's my only kit!" An old white queen cried. Silver fur from old age tinged her golden-spotted face.

"Iceheart, over here!" The voice of a tom clearly sounded above the chaos. It was through his eyes that Brightstar could see. His fur was golden with very faint brown markings that zagged like feather fluff. Gray fur was forming around his muzzle.

"Eaglesong, thank goodness! I got her!" Iceheart darted across the clearing and snagged up a one-moon-old kit by the scruff.

As Iceheart ran to the nursery, a shadow appeared over her. She dropped her kit as she was lifted off into the sky. She yowled furiously and tried to scratch the eagle with her long claws.

Eaglesong yowled curses and pelted across the clearing in a flash of golden fur. *I will not lose my sister!*

Eaglesong rang out his battle cry and jumped into the sky. He racked the eagle's back with a furious snarl. The eagle screeched and dropped Iceheart. She landed on the ground with deep scratches on her back, but otherwise, she was safe.

"Eaglesong! Let go! *You have to let go!*" Iceheart's yowl was carried away by the wind. In a panic, the eagle flew higher.

Higher, higher, higher until they were way above the trees. Eaglesong held on and dug his overgrown claws deep into the eagle's left wing.

The mighty bird let out one last magnificent cry, harmonizing along with Eaglesong's yowl as they plummeted to the swamp in a free-fall.

With a final, painful jolt through his body, his vision blacked.

~*~

It took a moment to realize that Brightstar was yowling out loud, her voice left her chest and took all the wing in her lungs with it.

"Take cover!" Brightstar led the patrol under a log and they quickly ducked underneath.

The eagle swooped overhead. The bird clawed at the log, trying to find the hiding cats inside, but failed. The bird cried with frustration and flew off into the sky. Goldpaw was breathing heavily with her fur fluffed up.

"Is it gone?" She whined and scooted closer to Dragonflight. Brightstar looked out from under the log and flexed her long claws.

"It is gone."

"Okay, come on, Goldpaw. You heard Brightstar, you can come out." Dragonflight reassured his terrified apprentice.

"Get familiar with what you feel. Warriors always have close brushes with death. It is the way of the clans," Rainpuddle warned. Goldpaw anxiously left the safety of the log.

"Let's go," Brightstar ordered and flicked her nicked tail. She had just realized that Goldpaw was always staring at her scars. The apprentice's eyes were filled with fear, awe, and admiration. Brightstar looked again at the sky. She silently thanked Sunstar for the vision.

After a while of walking, they approached the lake. Goldpaw sucked

in her breath as she saw the gathering island. It was a little foggy that morning, but the towering form of a tree can still be seen.

"Will I go there someday?" Goldpaw asked her mentor. He nodded.

"Of course, but it is Brightstar's decision when you go!" Dragonflight purred. "I remember my first gathering. Many new faces and scents surrounded me. I also had my first log ride!"

"Log ride?" She said looking around her.

"Over there, look!" Dragonflight pointed his muzzle to the hollowed-out log on the shore.

"We ride in those things across the water?" Goldpaw meowed while shuffling her paws with excitement.

"Yes, one day you will."

"What about the monsters?" Goldpaw's fur fluffed.

"Monsters?" Rainpuddle meowed, trying to keep a straight face.

"Yeah! Mother told me of huge lizards that swim underwater killing cats that get too close!" She whimpered looking warily at the water as if she was expecting an enormous overgrown gecko to burst out the water.

"Oh. Whiteflower means alligators. And yes, they will kill you if you are unaware of how powerful they really are. Both Dragonflight and I speak from experience, stay away from their jaws." Brightstar murmured while showing Goldpaw her tail. The white tooth stood out clearly against her golden fur. A white tail bone segment glistened under dried muscle tissue.

"That must be why mother was afraid!" Goldpaw whimpered.

"Don't worry, as long as we don't bother them they won't bother us!" Dragonflight purred and groomed Goldpaw's fluffy head.

"We should leave now. We are on the edge of our border with Waterclan's territory!" Rainpuddle suggested.

"I agree, maybe we should all go!" A gruff voice said from the reeds. The Fireclan cats hissed.

"We come in peace! We are still on our side!" A dark gray head poked out the long grass. He smelled of the grasslands.

Three more cats lept out from the reeds. Brightstar recognized There was Crowheart, Orchidpaw, a gray cat, and a blonde tabby to the very edge of the border.

"Brightstar! Wonderful, you will hear the news before Honeystar!" Crowheart hissed to himself.

"What is it?" Brightstar flexed her claws. She didn't like the way Orchidpaw was looking at her. The pretty she-cat seemed nervous and somewhat ashamed of something.

"Eaglestar passed away from old age a few nights ago," Crowheart muttered quietly. Even the crickets had stopped chirping. "I have received my lives from Starclan now, and I have been named Crowstar. Orchidflower is still upset that her father had joined Starclan, and we all feel the same way. I also took Sandfeather as my deputy."

"I'm sorry Eaglestar died. He was a wonderful leader, and he was very wise," Brightstar nodded to Crowstar as an equal. Crowstar did the same.

The black tom glanced at Goldpaw. His violet eyes twinkled with pride as if he remembered something. Two friends that have met as apprentices have both become leaders of their clan.

"It would be best that we leave now. Until we meet again at the gathering, Crowstar." Brightstar was the first to lead her patrol back to camp.

It was as peaceful as ever. The only two kits this year were playing by the creek shore. Brownfeather and Icefoot were watching over them with their tails entwined.

Robinfeather and Shadowshade were grooming each other under a magnolia tree.

The senior warriors were all out on patrol. Chimesong was pacing around the clearing.

"Is something wrong?" Rainpuddle asked the light brown tabby. Her brown eyes were distressed.

"I can't find Firetail anywhere! He should have come back with the morning hunting patrol! It's noon now!" She cried.

"I will go look for him," Brightstar volunteered. "Rainpuddle, take Chimesong to the medicine cat's den to calm down. Watch the place while I'm gone. I would like Shadowshade, Robinfeather, and Skysong to come along if they don't mind."

"Of course we can!" Robinfeather exclaimed with gleaming eyes.

Shadowshade's yellow eyes looked away from Brightstar. He had always been afraid of the large cat, even if she was the leader. Skysong nodded, happy to leave the camp.

"Okay, thank you." Brightstar meowed and padded out of the clearing with the two toms trailing behind her.

She immediately picked up Firetail's scent with her enhanced smell thanks to Ivyheart's blessing.

Birds and crickets didn't sing. The sky was gloomy and dark. The wind smelled of rain. Shadowshade rustled quietly behind Robinfeather, watching Brightstar carefully. Skysong yawned.

Brightstar lifted her tail quickly. *Halt!*

She had found Firetail. Robinfeather and Shadowshade had to stifle a gasp. The fluffy red tom was sharing a fish with a pretty white she-cat. Her fur was tinged pink. *Orchidflower! That's why she looked guilty earlier!*

"Starclan forbid!" Robinfeather hissed quietly. Even Shadowshade was enraged. His shiny black claws flexed. Skysong was staring at the two cats, rolling his eyes and trying not to gag. Brightstar couldn't stand it any longer. Something was bothering her.

"Are you two done yet?" She hissed like a rattlesnake. She slithered out the brambles, ignoring how tangled her fur got. Her long fangs were bared and her claws were unsheathed.

Orchidflower shot up first and took cover in the bushes, perhaps sensing a fight. Brightstar wasn't going to let this slip by her that easily! Firetail snarled. His eyes were clouded in anger and fear. He was cornered.

"How dare you betray your clan?" Brightstar hissed. She signaled for the three warriors behind her to chase and hold Orchidflower by her tail.

Fireclan always had advanced signals better than any other clan. Orchidflower would only think she was flicking her tail, but Firetail understood.

"Orchidflower, run!" Firetail yowled. The two Fireclan warriors were already holding Orchidflower.

Shadowshade was holding her scruff while Robinfeather held his claws up to her neck, waiting for Brightstar's order. Skysong stood by the side, his tail lashing. Firetail howled with rage and charged after Brightstar.

She hasn't gotten into a fight since before Ivyheart's blessing, but now she would test her strength.

Firetail launched at Brightstar. He would have struck her, but she moved out of the way with blinding speed and kicked his underbelly. The red tom was sent flying. With a heavy thud, he landed on his back. Orchidflower cried out loud.

"TRAITOR!" Brightstar yowled. Before Firetail can recover, she pinned him down. He dared to deceive his clan, he shall pay.

Firetail screamed. He tried to desperately kick her off, but Brightstar was too heavy. Brightstar felt her claws dig in further than she was used to. Would she accidentally kill him? She decided to stop and hold Firetail down.

"You know the price for betraying your clan like this is, right?"

Brightstar hissed in his ear. *"Banishment!"*

"*NO!* Let Orchidflower go! I would give my life for her! I was only taking care of her! She was grieving after she lost her parents, and I just couldn't stand to see her like that! I would know!" He cried pathetically.

Brightstar faintly remembered it. The broken red apprentice dragging Willowfog home. The grieving red warrior burying his father. No wonder he wanted to help this she-cat.

"Still, that is no excuse to break the warrior code!" Something stirred inside Brightstar, almost as if she had said those words before.

~*~

"Still, that is no excuse to break the warrior code!" An angry snarl echoed around the cave. Brightstar was slightly smaller than her current life. Her claws and teeth, however, were longer.

"Longclaw! Did you follow me here?" Citruspelt hissed.

"Why wouldn't I? I ordered you to go on dawn patrol the moment I saw you sneak off I followed you!" Longclaw scraped the floor with her claws.

The speckled brown tom, known as Citruspelt, flicked his tail nervously. Being caught by the deputy herself. A bluish-black she-cat whimpered behind him.

"Go back to camp. *Now!*" Longclaw demanded.

"Will you tell Skyrose's clan? It's my fault, I wanted to see her after the gathering..." Citruspelt mumbled.

"It depends if you get your fox-bitten tail back to camp!" Longclaw hissed dramatically.

"You are going to tell. You always do!" Citruspelt hissed back.

"You are both breaking the warrior code by seeing her. I hear

Waterclan is merciful this time around. But Fireclan on the other claw..." She stifled a laugh.

She always hated the brown tom. The stuck-up loser who rivaled her for deputy. He won't be a problem anymore.

"No, I won't go back!" Citruspelt snarled.

"Me neither!" Skyrose purred and twined her tail around the tom's.

"Last chance," Longclaw flexed her claws. She wasn't letting this cat go unscathed. Not after all the trouble, he caused her.

"I said no!" Citruspelt growled and began to walk out the den with his tail and head held higher than hers. He flicked both his ears at her and narrowed his eyes. A sign of utmost disrespect amongst Fireclan cats.

Longclaw charged at the tom. He was waiting for her and stepped out of her way. She hissed and unsheathed her claws. Longclaw quickly turned around and flew through the air. His paws hit her back.

She dug her fangs into his spine, trying to paralyze him. She could cripple him and let him slowly die. Yes, the perfect punishment for a traitor like him! Citruspelt yowled and fell to the floor, no longer able to move his lower body. Longclaw laughed and stepped back.

"Do you really think you can disrespect me? *How dare you!*" Longclaw snarled.

"Just finish me off already. The secret is out. It's over. Now I can't even run away with my sweet..." Citruspelt closed his eyes and laid his head on the dusty cave floor.

Skyrose wailed. She was a young warrior, too new to fight Longclaw. She would tear her to shreds. She looked at the small she-cat with her sad, blue eyes pleading to let the tom live.

"Don't worry, he will live... until the rest of Fireclan finds him!" Longclaw laughed.

"Please, please don't tell!" Skyrose stalled. Longclaw was so distracted thinking about her victory that she didn't realize the brown tom was trying his best to sneak up behind her with his two strong front legs. It was utterly humiliating, but Citruspelt got what he wanted.

As soon as Longclaw turned around red flashed before her golden eyes. Longclaw felt fire burn all the way down her neck. She rattled with fury and fell over feeling dizziness like none other. It was a familiar feeling, in fact, almost as something like this happened once before.

"H-how d...dare you..." Longclaw gurgled before lifting her claws into the air in front of Citruspelt.

"NO!" Skyrose yowled. She rushed forward to save her love, but it was too late. Citruspelt lay on the cave floor completely motionless.

Longclaw saw the anxious and grief-stricken she-cat call his name over and over. She even began to groom his fur and cry.

Longclaw felt something lift her up. It was not the calm presence of Starclan, but something else entirely.

Something... dark.

Something evil.

A single laugh echoed around her. The enormous shadow of a cat stalked the cave walls as Longclaw's vision disappeared into nothing.

~*~

She had said it before. That's why it felt familiar. She can feel Longclaw's anger course through her body. She thought about giving the same punishment she once gave to Citruspelt.

But... she was no longer Longclaw. She had changed. She has become more merciful and patient. Death is not the answer. Brightstar leaned closer to Firetail. He braced for the worst.

"Run as far as you can. If I ever see you again I will personally tear out your heart!" Brightstar yowled loudly in his torn ears.

The moment she released the red tom he shot off back to Orchidflower. The two cats ran off into the thicket. Brightstar had a feeling she won't ever be seeing them again.

"What should we do now?" Shadowshade whimpered. Even Robinfeather appeared to be shaken up. Skysong's fluffy fur was puffed up.

"Robinfeather, how would you like a new apprentice? Somebody must watch Bronzepaw now, and I know you asked me to wait until you are an older warrior, but he needs you now. Also, it's only fitting for both you and your brother to train a pair of siblings." Brightstar asked the little warrior.

"After all that's happened today, I would be honored!" Robinfeather declared.

"Very well. Let's return to camp to explain why Firetail won't be with us anymore." Brightstar growled quietly. Shadowshade flicked his tail.

The four Fireclan cats slipped into the thicket they came from and returned to their camp to give the news.

Revelation

[image]

***

The cats of Fireclan were shocked by Firetail's betrayal. Everyone was angry, but nobody was more enraged than Pebblepelt. The pretty she-cat would stalk the clearing muttering.

"Traitor! Why do such a thing?" She would hiss under her breath.

"Pebblepelt?" Silverpaw nudged his mentor softly. Pebblepelt turned and glared at the young tom, making him flinch. She forced herself to relax.

"I'm sorry, little Silverpaw. I forgot who you were for a moment. I thought I saw Firetail. You have the same fur shape. That reminds me, he was actually the son of Flamestar, who is the brother to both Stagleap, your father, and Stormwhisker, Brightstar's father. That makes Flamestar both you and Brightstar's uncle."

"Does that mean I'm related to two great leaders?" Silverpaw's storm gray eyes lit up.

"Of course! All of the golden cats in this clan and those related to them are all descendants of Sunstar herself," Pebblepelt explained. Brightstar perked her ears at the mention of Sunstar.

"Did Sunstar have kits?" Brightstar blurted. Pebblepelt appeared unphased. Brightstar remembered that she had told the medicine cat about her past lives.

"Yes, she did Brightstar! Don't you know your own lineage?" Pebblepelt teased.

"No, I never thought about it!" Brightstar admitted. *That explains why we all look the same.* "Does anybody know the name of her kits?"

"Yes. Their names were Lilyflower and Thunderfall. Lilyflower was the elder kit. It is said that she had goldish-white tabby fur and brown eyes. Her brother was black with both brown and gold stripes. He also had brown eyes. Only a few of Sunstar's descendants had golden eyes like Sunstar herself!" Pebblepelt said as a matter of factly.

"If you had to guess, how many had golden eyes besides me?" Brightstar asked calmly.

"There are only thirteen recorded. I memorized all their names in order, want me to tell you?"

"Please!"

"Sunstar was the first. Then it was Longclaw, Firesky, Hawkfeather, Dawnstripe, Starfall, Duskwing, Brokenheart, Lynxtail, Eveningswirl, Eaglesong, Leopardshine, and then you." Pebblepelt paused as she saw the golden cat's face twist with horror. "You don't think it can mean..." Pebblepelt paused.

Brightstar had told her about her visions and the interruption during her ritual and the same thought now plaguing Brigtstar struck her.

"It is," Brightstar confirmed. Pebblepelt sighed. Silverpaw looked back and forth between his big sister and his mentor.

"Don't worry about it. That's an order. Goodnight, you two. I'm going to sleep early," Brightstar said and stalked off. Pebblepelt said something to Silverpaw and together they left, heading to the medicine cat's den.

~*~

"Hey Eve, do you want to hunt with me?" A cream tabby tom purred. A large she-cat with golden fur with two dark brown stripes down her back like a chipmunk yawned.

"Fine, hold on a moment," Eveningswirl got up and stretched. Her bright golden fur was almost cream in the moonlight. The crickets still chirped when she entered the clearing. Silverpelt glistened

overhead.

"Over here!" The cream tom whispered. The two cats left the camp through the main entrance.

"What are we hunting today, Rivershore?" Eveningswirl purred.

"Yesterday on patrol I caught the scent of a deer!" Rivershore yowled a bit too loudly.

"Rivershore, You know hunting deer is very dangerous! You of all cats should know!" Eveningswirl scolded.

"But you took down a deer already!" Rivershore complained. "Besides, we are already here!" Eveningswirl's fur stood on end.

"NO! We need to return to camp right now before-" A twig snapped and Eveningswirl was cut off.

The sun was just coming up in the sky, painting it a bright purple. The huge albino stag revealed himself in the dim light and banged his twelve-point antlers against a tree.

He scraped his hooves on the ground, lowered his head, and charged. Rivershore screamed and laughed himself out the way as the stag barreled right past him.

Even before he hit the ground, a sharp scream echoed through the marsh. He landed heavily on his paws and snapped his head around. His heart dropped.

"No..." He muttered. The stag was gone, leaving only three things behind. His two white antlers and a mangled golden cat.

"Eve!" Rivershore cried and ran up to his friend. Eveningswirl could hardly hear him. She can hardly breathe or see. The sky was blood red from the sunrise.

She looked at him with her blinded gold eyes. A long scratch ran across her left eye. Rivershore buried his head in her fur.

"I'm sorry! I'm sooooo sorry!" Rivershore cried. His voice was slowly

fading away. Eveningswirl used the last of her energy to nudge him with her tail. Darkness cascaded around her, but she heard one last voice.

"Eve, don't go! I- I love you!"

~*~

The next morning Brightstar was dragging her tail behind her. She probably had a grumpy expression on her face because her entire clan seemed uneasy when they looked at her. Yeah. Probably.

Brightstar tried not to visit inside the medicine cat's den anymore after her crazy dream. If she got injured, she would just deal with it. The antlers on the bone crown were smaller than the albino stag's rack, but she still didn't want to see it.

"Brightstar, are you okay?" Cloudstorm asked.

"Just a nightmare. I will be just fine, don't worry!" Brightstar tried to sound unshook, but the tiredness in her eyes would give her away.

That stag had to have been sent by Starclan, it had to be. An albino stag instantly charging at me? Leaving his antlers behind? Foxdung! Bucks only shed around a certain time of year!

Cloudstorm didn't question her again and went to talk to some warriors on the edge of the clearing. Shadowshade and Robinfeather were talking together while Pebblepelt was gathering algae from the water with Silverpaw. Icefoot was watching his two kits run around chasing each other.

"Frostkit, Mosskit, watch the water!" He shouted anxiously at them. The two kits didn't listen.

"Kit trouble?" Brightstar meowed.

"Can't you tell?" Icefoot sighed.

"Want me to get them?" She offered.

"That would be wonderful!" The two cats approached the energetic kits. They both froze once the towering she-cat loomed over them, her fangs shimmering from the ripples of sunlight that filtered through the leaves. Mosskit was the first to speak.

"Are you Sunstar?" The little kit shivered. Brightstar hoped *she* didn't shiver as well.

"No, Mosskit. This is Brightstar, our clan leader. Sunstar is long gone!" Icefoot chuckled. Brightstar felt her fur stand on end. *That's what you think.* She thought grimly.

"Kits." Brightstar snorted. She nearly knocked the two small kits over with her huff.

"Brightstar wants you to stay away from the water. Can you do that for her?" The two kits nodded their heads before whispering to each other on their way to the nursery. Brightstar's ears picked up their conversation.

"That's Sunstar, she looks exactly like the cat in the story mother told us about! Gold fur, black stripes, gold eyes, she even has a scar over her left eye!" Mosskit hissed to her sister

"Da said Sunstar is dead!" Frostkit growled.

"Well... uhh... maybe she never died!" Mosskit proclaimed. It was clear that she was trying to scare Frostkit. It was sure working because Frostkit whimpered with fear.

"Kits are a pawful. Have you thought about having any?" Icefoot said while watching his two white kits chase each other to the nursery where their mother was waiting.

"I don't love anyone. Besides, I'm too busy to raise kits." Brightstar said. To her knowledge, Sunstar had only two.

"I guess that makes sense!" Icefoot purred, showing his support for his leader before stalking off to the nursery where he rubbed heads with his mate.

Brightstar was also walking away. The memory of Eveningswirl

entered her thoughts. Rivershore didn't look like anyone in the clan.

His cream pelt isn't visible on any of the cats alive at the moment. Did he have kits at all? Was he grieving for Eveningswirl the entire time?

Brightstar thought about Firetail. He loved Orchidflower enough to abandon his duties as a warrior and live in exile with her. He must have truly loved her.

Brightstar was convinced that she did the right thing letting them live. *See, Longclaw? Not everything must end in death.*

The cold air whipped her face as she looked up at the cloudy sky. She sat there for a moment, almost expecting Starclan to send something after her to rip away one of her three lives.

That's what they did to my other incarnations. None of them lived long enough to retire. They all met horrible deaths, even the lives that did only good things. Brightstar thought to herself. Theories were forming in her head. She felt dizzy.

"What is it? A vision?" Pebblepelt strolled up beside her leader.

"No, not a vision. Something else entirely. I need to visit your nest for a moment. May I scratch the walls if I need to?" She asked the medicine cat politely. Pebblepelt was confused, but she nodded.

"Anything you need," She said before leading Brightstar inside her den. The golden cat instantly got to work. She started pacing and scraping the walls. She laid out twelve flowers before her. Six were red. Six were blue. Pebblepelt watched curiously.

The first two flowers were red. The next two were blue. The pattern repeated itself. Brightstar started to whisper to herself. The medicine cat had to strain to hear Brightstar.

"All are Fireclan cats. Two females, two males. Two more females, two more males. Again, one more time. Then me... one female..." Brightstar whispered as if in a trance.

"What are you saying?" Pebblebelt's tail was flailing around

nervously.

"It means that there is a pattern with each reincarnation, look at the flowers. I become female for two lives, then male for the next two. Sunstar and Longclaw were female. right after them it was Firesky and Hawkfeather, who were males. Right now I'm a female without a pair. Could this mean something? Is Dawnstripe's prophecy false hope?" Brightstar had buried her long claws into the dirt. Her gold eyes strained on the flowers.

"I don't know. I really don't..." Pebblepelt admitted. It would be useless trying to comfort her friend, but something lit up in her head.

"Sunstar was the only life you were leader in. Yet here you are, as Brightstar. Maybe this is your chance to break the cycle. Do you think Starclan is trying to help you?" Pebblepelt felt her heart lift for a moment.

Yes, Starclan must be helping! Pebblepelt thought with hope.

She instantly lost her enthusiasm as Brightstar snarled and threw Pebblepelt to the ground. The medicine cat was stunned. Brightstar stood over her, her fangs bared and her face contorted with unforgivable rage.

"They never helped me before, Pebblepelt. Why would they do so now?" Sunstar quietly growled. Pebblepelt saw something sparkly trickle down her friend's face.

"They have killed every innocent life after Sunstar's savagery. My past few incarnations had good intentions. They made friends and had lovers. Who would love a monster?"

"What do you mean? Were your first incarnations good?" Pebblepelt said, slowly standing up so as to not trigger Brightstar's anger again. She didn't ever want to feel those long claws in her flesh.

"The first incarnations were as selfish as Sunstar, some were even bloodthirsty as her. Even Dawnstripe appeared innocent until she became a medicine cat," Brighstar paused to glance at the crown of

bones resting on a wall. The white tangle was dimly lit in its corner.

"What if Starclan killed you because they somehow saw Sunstar's savagery in you? What if they struck you down each time you failed to save the clan, or each time you did something evil? What if..." Pebblepelt breathed in. "What if they were just trying to teach you a lesson in each life?"

"What's that supposed to mean?" Brightstar hissed. Her face was in front of Pebblepelt's. The medicine cat's back was against the wall. Her heart pounded loudly in her ears. Brightstar's unsheathed claws were lifted into the air near Pebblepelt's throat. She had to say something... and quickly!

"It's like what you're doing now, lifting your claws to me instead of instantly killing me! You learned mercy from living again and again so many times, but Sunstar never left you! You are Sunstar, Starclan is trying to help you get past your savage ways by making you live as different cats that were all raised differently. But whatever they do, they can't get rid of Sunstar, because she never died. Dawnstripe was one of the sweetest cats in Fireclan before she was consumed with the power of foresight. Starclan sent a rattlesnake after her to be rid of another danger to the wetlands. And maybe when you live old enough to retire, Starclan still kills you in order to give you another chance to break the spell instead of laying about as an elder doing nothing. Can't you see, you are her, you are Sunstar!"

"I am NOT HER!" Brightstar roared before slashing her claws at Pebblepelt. The medicine cat shut her eyes and braced herself, ready to feel the terrifying claws rip open her throat.

It never happened. Instead she heard a loud crash on the ground. She slowly opened her eyes to find Brightstar looking at her paws while sitting on her haunches. The wall in front of her was where the bone crown was mounted... but now it was on the ground, smashed into multiple fragments.

The cat and prey bones had all fallen off. The deer rack was still intact, but there was something underneath where the bones once were.

Pebblepelt carefully walked next to Brighstar to see what happened.

"Isn't that Sunstar's first crown that she lost during the battle with Waterclan and Forestclan?" Pebblebelt gasped.

"It wasn't lost, it was here all along. When did Dawnstripe start wearing a crown?" Brightstar pawed at the crown, turning it over and looking at it from different angles.

"Nobody knows when Dawnstripe made a crown, but Sunstar started wearing hers soon after she became leader. Sunstar was still a warrior named Sunpool when she found something sticking out of the mud. It was the skull of a very large cat. Some fur was still attached to the skull. It was gold and black. It was the skull of a leopard that must have escaped from the twolegs and got trapped in the swamp. Sunpool took the teeth and made a humble crown for herself and even a necklace with the smaller teeth. She kept the crown in secret, but once she became leader she proudly wore it for everyone to see. She even added small deer antlers later on, but I always thought Dawnstripe was imitating Sunpool with a new crown." Pepplepelt paused to stare at the ancient crown.

"It wasn't long before she wanted the entire wetlands for herself, claiming to be its ruler, decreed by Starclan themself. Why else would a leopard skull appear to her, a black and gold cat? It turns out that she wasn't the destined ruler she believed she was because Starclan stripped all of her nine lives out of her body in the heat of battle. Her crown and necklace was lost in the sand where she fought on the beach of Fireclan's shore. I guess the legend is true..." Pebblepelt carefully picked up the crown and placed it back on its mount. Right as she did, something came loose. It started to dangle underneath the crown. It was the lost necklace.

"But... I would never want to do that. Ruling the wetlands, that's not like me!" Brightstar signed heavily.

"Then Starclan's plan for you must be working." Pebblepelt said. This time Brightstar didn't attack her. She just started at Sunstar's crown.

"I am Sunstar," Brightstar whispered. "But she isn't me. Sunstar

would've killed Firetail and Orchidflower. Sunstar would have let the eagle attack the weaker cats in the camp. Sunstar would not have wanted peace with Forestclan, she would refuse and continue to fight. Maybe I have changed?" Brightstar said hopefully.

She remembered what she told Crowstar about what kind of warrior she wanted to be when she first met him. *I want to be strong. I want to be feared. I want all the kits who laughed at me to cower whenever they see me. I want their respect and loyalty. I will lead my clanmates into wars and conquer new lands.* She had really wanted that at the time, but not anymore.

She even remembered her last words to Lionfur. *Don't think I forgot the time you let Rosepaw die. I won't ever forgive you for that! I wish you were dead in Starclan with her!* She had no remorse as a youngster. But now she feels regret and grief instead of anger. She wanted her brother back. She had changed. She may be Sunstar, but Sunstar wasn't her. *Sunstar isn't me!*

A rare smile crept across Brightstar's face as she twined her tail around Pebblepelt's.

"Thank you, Pebblepelt, thank you for showing me what I failed to see. Thank you, *again*."

Flames and Hail

[image]

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Many cats were gathered at the entrance of the medicine cat's den after the loud crash Brightstar caused. They all crowded around Brightstar and Pebblepelt as they exited.

They only heard Briststar yell followed by the crown shatter, but nothing else. Pebblepelt reassured the clan that everything is alright and none of them are hurt.

Brightstar needed a nap. She asked Rainpuddle to take charge and organize patrols for tomorrow morning before drifting off into a long sleep. As if to prove a point, Brightstar received a vision from one of her past lives.

~*~

In her dream, she looked around her, feeling lightheaded and tired. She coughed and sputtered as she tried to get to water.

"Firesky, help us!" A voice screamed. A pure golden cat with black spots on his face turned around. There was a group of warriors stranded in the flames. The fire licked at their fur almost as if it were trying to groom them.

"Hold on, I'm on my way!" Firesky yelped before going into a fit of coughing. His old body was still capable of running! He pelted across the ash of his beloved home, his paws splashing in the damp mud.

Using the remains of trees he managed to reach the warrior crying for help. One cat he recognized, but the others were unfamiliar. They all looked up at him, as if they were expecting help from a warrior of another clan.

"Owlclaw, come with me!" Firesky choked on the heat of the roaring fire. His pads were sweating intensely.

"No, Firesky. I know you! If I come with you, you'll face me to leave the other cats behind!" Owlclaw screeched. The inferno was terrifyingly loud now, and it was getting worse.

"No! Come with me or die! I will not help any other clan than my own!" Firesky hissed. He was truly willing to help Owlclaw, why was she refusing his help? She wanted to live, right?

"I REFUSE!" Owlclaw screamed.

"FINE, THEN DIE HERE!" Firesky cackled furiously before leaping back the way he was previously fleeing from.

He should have looked before he lept. He got a face full of fire. He screamed as his flesh burned. His golden fur turned to black as he desperately scraped a nearby tree, trying to escape the pain. It was either a miracle or a curse that he wasn't dead yet.

A paw reached out to him and he reluctantly took it. He quickly realized his savior didn't have the ear tufts like the cats of Fireclan have. This cat was not of his clan, but they were helping him?

Am I wrong about other clan cats? Do they care about their clan as much as I care about mine? But... why try and help me... it's already too late... Firesky's thoughts suddenly seemed very quiet.

He looked closer at the cat, wanting to see the face of his savior. It was a white tom with brown stripes. The tom had wide, sky blue eyes that glittered with friendliness... and pity... for him, Firesky. The tom dragged him out of the fire and into a safe clearing.

"I know I should leave you here too since you left me, but I can't stand to see somebody die alone like that!" The tom sighed, panting and coughing. His white face was covered in soot.

"Thank you..." Firesky said through gritted teeth. "What's... your name?

"Wrenflight. I was named after the little birds that flew around the

nursery when I was a kit. I don't know why I mentioned that, a habit, I guess."

"Wrenflight, thank you, again." Firesky whispered. The tom's face was fading away.

"I hope you find peace in Starclan," Wrenflight replied right before Firesky became unresponsive.

~*~

It was time for another gathering. Leaf-bare had set in, its cold claws clutched the wetlands with a icy grasp.

The lake was frozen over, a rare sight to behold. All of the cats going to the gathering gazed with awe and wonder, except Brightstar.

She had seen a leaf-bare like this before sometime long ago. She tried to focus on just who exactly went through a time like this. *Think, Brightstar, think!*

A name was already forming in her head but before she could remember anything her deputy, Rainpuddle, called out above the meowing cats.

"Okay, everyone, the ice is thin, but using the log we can carve a path to the island!" She lifted her silver tail up with confidence as she helped push the hollowed log into the water.

"First group, time to ride!" The silver she-cat yowled. Brightstar no longer rode with the first group. She was always last on the way to and from the island. She wanted to make sure nobody got left behind. And to think I always wanted to go first. I really have changed. I really, really did.

Once she had made it to the island, many of the cats were playing in the snow. Small flakes began to flutter down onto her fur. She managed to spot a dark cat waiting at the oak tree for her.

"You are really easy to find in snow," Brightstat scoffed before shaking her heavy coat.

"You look like a giant yellow fluff ball!" Crowstar snickered. Brightstar used her long tail to smack him with snow. Crowstar sneezed and Brightstar took an opportunity to mock him.

"You sneeze like a kitten!" She purred while sticking her tongue to catch a snowflake.

"You seem more cheerful than- ever, actually! I have never seen you this happy before!" Crowstar snorted.

"I figured something out!" Brightstar exclaimed proudly. *But you shouldn't know what I figured out. Would you still be my friend if I looked and still acted like Sunstar? I doubt it. I wouldn't want to be friends with* her, *that's for sure.*

"What a fine leaf-bare night, wouldn't you say?" Honeystar said while revealing himself from a burrow he made in the snow. He almost looked like a prairie dog.

"Honeystar? Why were you digging underground?" Brightstar asked, tilting her head.

"You aren't spying on us are you?" Crowstar huffed.

"No, no, no! Forestclan cats love to dig! I have never dug in snow before!" Honeystar claimed.

"Okay then, just don't go digging out into us again!" Crowstar said with a small growl. Brightstar was glaring at him. *Forestclan cats do dig, but they don't dig burrows. Ivyheart knows that.*

"I'm ready to start this gathering, How about you?" Honeystar said cooly, glancing at Brightstar a second longer than Crowstar.

"I suppose we should," Brightstar replied before giving a mighty leap up into the tree and calling the clans together. Before the leaders could welcome the clans to the gathering the wind suddenly picked up. It whirled through the oak tree, shaking it to its core.

"What's happening?" A cat shrieked from below. Brightstar flicked as she saw a large ball of ice fall from the sky and shatter in front of her into a million pieces.

"A HAILSTORM!" The golden leader yowled. "Take cover, quickly!" She launched off the oak tree to find her clan.

They were all running away, trying to take cover in bushes or under the oak tree. Brightstar felt her fur stand on end as she saw her little sister, Goldpaw, frozen in fear. Her sparkling brown eyes were aimed at the sky, almost daring something to hit her.

"Goldpaw, snap out of it!" Brightstar snarled and lightly smacked her sister with one paw. Goldpaw blinked and looked up at Brightstar, cowering beneath her.

"Brightstar! Look out!" Crowstar cried before jumping over her. He was like the shadow of an eagle soaring through the sky. Something struck him and he crashed on the ground with a sharp scream of pain.

"Idiot, you didn't have to do that!" Brightstar scolded him, but it was worthless. She turned to her sister. "Go to your siblings, I'll be there soon."

"Okay..." Goldpaw whimpered before running out from underneath her sister. Brightstar started dragging Crowstar's lifeless body underneath the oak tree.

His clan gathered around him, each of them meowing with uncertainty. Honeystar remained on the other side of the tree with his clan. He glared at Brightstar.

Soon the storm subsided, but only after ice pelted down from the sky. Many cats were injured with some even being dead. There were fortunately no deaths in Fireclan.

Wails Echoed throughout the island. Cats left behind at clan camps were on the shoreline looking out to the island.

Brightstar was pacing. Crowstar was taking a bit long to wake up. She finally had time to breathe once the black tom took a shuddering breath. The wound on his back was healed and he was as good as ever. He looked even younger than before the storm.

"What did I miss?" He said with a smile. His clan gathered around

him, almost smothering him. Brightstar snickered and made her way to her own clan. Rainpuddle was the first to meet her.

"Brightstar, many cats are wounded. We should go back home right this instant." Rainpuddle requested hastily. Brightstar nodded in agreement. Pebblepelt and Silverpaw can help fix them up.

"This gathering is over, we must take care of the wounded and bury our dead. We will meet here again in one moon." Brightstar announced.

Crowstar was already gathering his cats while Honeystar looked very disappointed. He had something to say at this gathering.

Ha, try again next time, mole. Brightstar laughed in her mind and she helped load up cats in the log to go back home. *Thanks for the save, Crowstar.*

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Cats were waiting on the other side of the lake. Pebblepelt and Siverpaw gathered warriors and apprentices that were guarding the camp to gather and bring as much herbs and moss as they could carry.

Pebblepelt showed Silverpaw how to treat wounds with moss. She wasn't able to teach young Silverpaw about covering wounds because no cat has gotten Injured since Brighstar took leadership.

"Thank goodness I have a smart medicine cat." Brightstar sighed with great relief.

"Did the gathering start?"

"I called everyone to the tree, then hail started to drip from the sky." The stars were not visible tonight.

"Did you lose a life?" Pebblepelt asked quietly with her head lowered.

"No, actually. Crowstar saved me and lost one of his. I wish I could thank him, but I didn't get a chance to." Brightstar admitted.

"He deserves to be the Waterclan leader." Pebblepelt smiled. "I'm glad you're safe."

With one last glance at the golden cat Pebblepelt started gathering moss to treat her new patients with.

~*~

Once everyone was settled in a nest, the entirety of Fireclan was blessed with a peaceful sleep thanks to Pebblepelt and Silverpaw's swift actions.

Silverpaw had learned everything he needed to become a medicine cat. Brightstar thought about her other two siblings before drifting off to sleep. Her next vision... might have been the saddest one yet.

This time Brigthstar was looking through the eyes of a middle-aged tom. This tom was mostly black with a golden underbelly. Golden stripes also zapped along his spine.

He was at the great oak with the other two clans. Not at a gathering, no, but they were all sharing the island after a fire raged through the swamp. They were all anxiously waiting for the wetlands to regrow so they could go home.

An old tomcat was walking towards a group of sick cats that were all huddled under the tree. His light frame shivered and he would have fallen over if it wasn't for another tomcat that caught his fall. The other tomcat was as old as the first and was completely black. Together they made their way to the group.

"Thank you, Sparrowflight. You were always looking out for me." One of the tomcats purred.

"Were? I still am looking out for you," Sparrowflight scoffed sarcastically. The first tom smiled.

"Remember those little birds we would chase around in the nursery? I always got close to them before you chased them off!" The first tom sighed and looked at the sky almost as if he was imagining little birds flying through the frigid air.

"How can I forget? You threw a hissy fit and always rattled about it to mother. I miss Greenfur, don't you, Wrenstar?" Sparrowflight twined his tail around his brother's. The two sat in silence for a while before Brightstar started coughing violently. The toms looked over.

"Are you okay?" Wrenstar sat up even though it took a lot of effort to do so. Sparrowflight stayed on the ground staring at Brightstar.

"Yeah, fine." Brightstar replied with a young, gruff male voice. Brightstar certainly did not feel fine.

"You are a Fireclan cat, I can tell by the ears. Hmm... golden eyes. And a scar over your left eye. You remind me of someone." Wrenstar paused to think. His blue eyes were dull and almost faded. The old tom was for sure on his last life as leader of Waterclan.

"He looks like that cat you once saved from the fire," Sparrowflight reminded his brother.

"Firesky! You look like Firesky!" Wrenstar blurted.

"You knew my great grandfather? I never met him before but I heard stories about how strong he was!" Brightstar blurted.

"Yes, I did. I was with him when he went on to Starclan. I sure hope I can find him someday." Wrenstar purred. "What's your name?"

"Hawkfeather. My name is Hawkfeather."

"Sounds better than Wrenflight!" Sparrowflight snorted. Wrenstar whacked him in the face with his tail. Hawkfeather started to laugh but ended up coughing again. This time as he hacked up silva, there were drops of red in the spat.

"That's not good..." Sparrowflight whispered.

"To be honest, I'm not feeling my best right now." Wrenstar admitted to his brother.

"I'm sure we all feel terrible at the moment. I know I can use a nap." Sparrowflight growled before resting his head on his paws.

"Yeah, that would be nice. Care to join us, Hawkfeather?" Wrenstar purred. Hawkfeather dragged himself beside Wrenstar. Their fur was covered in frost. Sparrowflight was also shivering. Wrenstar twined his white tail once more around his brother's black tail.

As Hawkfeather fell asleep, he heard Wrenstar whisper to them.

"I'll see you both in Starclan, I promise."

~*~

Part Three - Bloody Beliefs

[image]

FIRECLAN

Leader

Brightstar - Fearsome long-furred golden tabby with golden eyes. Has overgrown claws and teeth. Long scar across her left eye.

Deputy

Rainpuddle - Longhair silver tabby with striking blue eyes. The tufts on her ears are unusually long.

Medicine Cat

Pebblepelt - Clever brown she-cat with spots the color of river stones.

Medicine Cat Apprentice

Silverpaw - Small, skinny silver tom with brown paws and two dark gray stripes running down his back and sparkling blue eyes.

Warriors

Stagleap - Handsome brown tom with a white underbelly and white spots on back. Brown eyes.

Cloudstorm - Blue tom with blue eyes.

Firetail - Fluffy, long-furred ginger tabby tom with brown eyes. Scar over back.

Icefoot - Pale white tom with one blue one brown eye.

Shadowshade - Pure black tom with strange black eyes Scars all over body and a snapped tail.

Skysong - Silver tabby tom with white blotches and blue eyes. Scars across chest.

Dragonflight - A small, fluffy white tom with blazing yellow eyes.

Robinfeather - A small, short-haired white tom with a red underbelly and yellow eyes.

Snowfall - Pretty white she-cat with golden paws and gold flecks on her face. Yellow eyes.

Apprentices

Goldpaw - Short-furred golden tabby she-cat with light brown eyes.

Mentor; Dragonflight

Bronzepaw - Large brown tom with white spots on his back and deep light eyes.

Mentor; Firetail

Queens

Chimesong - light brown tabby she-cat with brown eyes. Mother of Mosskit and Frostkit.

Elders

Mistygaze - Grey she-cat with silver eyes.

Eaglefeather - Brown tom with a white underbelly and yellow eyes.

Swanwing - Pretty white she-cat with pale yellow eyes.

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WATERCLAN

Leader

Crowstar - Tall, pure black long-furred tom with icy blue eyes.

Deputy

Sandfeather - Tall, bulky tan tom with amber eyes.

Medicine Cats

Fireflight - Black she-cat with unusual red splotches and amber eyes.

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FORESTCLAN

Leader

Honeystar - A short, stocky honey-brown tom with greenish-amber

Deputy

Pinenose - Skinny white she-cat with brown eyes.

Medicine Cats

Fernleaf - Brown tom with green eyes.

Warriors

Greenpetal - Skinny white she-cat with a scratched face and green eyes.

Intruders

~*~

After checking in on the injured cats before, Brightstar joined the dawn patrol before sunrise. She was with Skysong, Shadowshade, Robinfeather, and Bronzepaw near the Forestclan border before they heard rustling under the ground. Believing it to be a tasty morsel, Bronzepaw began stalking.

For such a large cat, he was silent on his paws. Brightstar couldn't even hear his steps, which was impressive for an apprentice. He often forgets that he had bright white spots on his back and didn't quite blend in the background while hunting, so he had learned to hunt under the cover of trees to hide, much like a fawn would hide from predators.

His brown ears swirled around and managed to pinpoint the sound. His large snout was pointed towards the ground beneath a small hill. His mouth was open, trying to find a scent of the potential prey, but then his fur stood on end. He slowly made eye contact with Brightstar, and she saw the terrified look on his face.

Brightstar smacked her tail in the air, creating a small *whip* sound. Shadowshade and Robinfeather ceased what they were doing and froze at the command. Bronzepaw managed to mouth one word through his trembling jaw...

Forestclan.

Something white launched out from the mound and tackled Bronzepaw, pinning him to the upturned dirt. Brightstar was the first to react and barreled into the white warrior. They both flipped over together in a hissing ball of fur.

Skysong didn't waste any time and charged into the burrow where the white Forestclan cat appeared from with Robinfeather and Shadowshade on his tail. Startled screams echoed underground.

Bronzepaw was glancing back and forth between his mentor and his sister, unsure of what to do. He wasn't panicking, but simply didn't know how to help. After all, it's just his first battle. He eventually stood at the tunnel, waiting to ambush any fleeing Forestclan cats with his large, fluffy body.

Meanwhile, Brightstar was smacking Greenpetal's head aggressively against a nearby rock. This stupid she-cat was the daughter of the no-good fleabag that killed Rosepaw. She effortlessly picked the bleeding cat and tossed her across the clearing against the tree. Bronzepaw looked over at his sister with wide, watchful eyes, studying his elder sister's brute force.

Greenpetal was leaning against the pine tree. The side of her head was bashed and bloody. She panted and tried to sneak around, but Brightstar snarled at her every time she attempted to escape.

"Bronzepaw, hold her down for me, and make sure she doesn't escape." She commanded her brother and instantly turned her back on the dizzy white cat, trusting that Bronepaw would take good care of her. He was around her size when she was his age and had the same stoic expressions, even if he happened to be a little scatterbrained at times. Still, he would never let Greenpetal go.

She casually entered the burrow the forest cats dug. The tunnel went on for several foxlenghs into Fireclan territory. *Ivyheart is positive that Forestclan can't dig burrows. They must've learned recently. Those dumb cats actually have brains, who knew.*

She finally caught up to her own warriors. The two toms were outnumbered. There were at least five Forestclan cats surrounding them. Brightstar confidently bumped her way through the crowd. No cats challenged the beefy, pissed off golden clan leader.

She managed to shoulder her way all the way to her own warriors without a single scratch. The three Fireclan cats seemed relieved to see their scowling leader. Clearing her throat, she gave a wonderful speech to the opposing warriors.

"Get. *Out*." She snarled. The invaders scrambled out of the tunnel, not wanting to face her fury. In fact, some of the warriors had deep

scratch markings on their face from previous encounters with her claws.

"What's going on?" She turned to her clanmates. The toms glanced at each other, a little dumbfounded before, shrugging their shoulders.

"Forget it, I have somebody I need to question." She left the burrow with the two toms behind her. Bronzepaw and Greenpetal were out of sight. Brightstar whipped her tail in the air once again, and the large brown apprentice came out the trees, dragging the unconscious white cat by the scruff.

"Perfect, I have questions for her, nice job, all of you. Let's get back to camp and set up guards at this border. I have a feeling Honeystar played dumb at the gatherings for a reason. This isn't the last time we'll see Forestclan, I can absolutely guarantee it.

***

The side of her head was patched up with sopping wet moss, courtesy of Silverpaw. The dazzled warrior was curled in a hastily-made nest inside Pepplepelt's den. As Brightstar sauntered in, Greenpetal lifted her chin off her paws and instinctively arched her back and began hissing.

"*Enough!*" Brightstar snapped as the angry warrior. The harsh, sharp tone of her voice was more than enough to shut Greenpetal up. She pushed back against the wall behind her and lowered her back. Her ears were flat against her head and the whites of her green eyes showed as she looked up at Brightstar.

"What do you think you're doing, burrowing into our territory?" Brightstar spat and bared her fangs. Greenpetal flinched and moved her mouth, but not a word slipped out.

Pebblepelt was next to the two she-cats along with Silverpaw. Brightstar took a step towards the forest cat with unsheathed claws and Silverpaw nudged his way in between them. He stood on shaky legs in his sister's enormous shadow, but he stood his ground, much to her surprise. She took a step back, but continued to glare at the

enemy. Greenpetal broke eye contact and stared at the ground.

"Honeystar told us to, but didn't say why." Greenpetal murmured.

"What did he want to say at the last gathering?" The golden cat demanded.

"I don't know. He doesn't tell us anything anymore ever since Flamestar died. It aggravates me more than anyone. Our clanmates keep getting injured and many of my kin have died already. None of us knows what his goal is." She growled, her voice rising as her sentence went on. Brightstar spat again and marched out the den. She had invited her clanmates to listen in on the conversation and was muttering amongst themselves.

"Snowfall, follow me." She motioned to a gorgeous white she-cat with golden paws and flecks on her face. Her yellow eyes sparkled at the mention of her name. She was Dragonflight and Robinfeather's littermate. She was too sick to join her siblings during the apprentice ceremony and joined them a little late. She became Rainpuddle's apprentice once she Pebblepelt healed her.

Her sense of smell was astounding and she always tracked down the best prey. Unfortunately, her bright white pelt always often gave her position away and she wasn't the best hunter. She often hunted with her old mentor and the best hunters to compensate.

"Where are you going?" Rainpuddle asked, curious that her hunting partner was leaving camp without her.

"I want to find out where exactly these forest cats are coming from. I was hoping Snowfall could track them down for me." Brightstar huffed, checking the sky for rain clouds.

"You're going alone?" Rainpuddle snickered. Brightstar paused for a moment.

"Wanna come with?"

"Absolutely!"

***

Once the trio arrived at the scene of the crime at the border, they crossed paths with the evening patrol consisting of Dragonflight, Goldpaw, and Stagleap. Now the group was six cats strong, Forestclan better stay in their woods.

Snowfall instantly picked up the pine scent of Forestclan and led them all to a trail of pawprints. They followed Snowfall, her nose to the ground, picking up dirt on her muzzle. Her tail twitched in the direction of the trail every time it changed direction... and it changed direction *constantly*. It was like Forestclan had a dance party at the edge of the border.

"Something else is here. It smells like rotting meat and it's buried underneath Fireclan's pine scent." She paused to look around the clearing. "Look, the pawprints are random, they spread their scent like this on purpose. They are hiding something."

"This is in our territory near Willow Island where gatherings take place." Stagleap mentioned with his ears pinned to his head.

"Wait, I found something!" Goldpaw announced loudly. She shivered a little once all the cats turned her direction.

"What is it? Dragonflight padded up to his golden apprentice to see what she discovered.

"There's a lot of gray, black, and white fur here. Not many Forestclan cats have these colors. Our clan has a good mix, yet we didn't get in any fights here, it was all in the tunnels. Could this possibly be Waterclan?" Goldpaw pondered. She started pacing as she spoke.

"That doesn't make sense, Waterclan has no reason to wander this far into our territory." Rainpuddle pointed out.

"Who else could it be, though? Maybe Forestclan tricked them somehow?" Goldpaw argued and started scratching a tree, feeling confused.

"I won't rule out that possibility. Crowstar would send help if I asked for it. I also won't be surprised if Forestclan managed to lure

them over." Brightstar muttered to herself. "We should ask them what happened. Perhaps then we'll discover the full story."

***

"Yes, we were lured there by a brand-new apprentice. Pretty clever, come to think of it." The Waterclan deputy, Sandfeather, sighed. The Fireclan patrol had been welcomed into the Waterclan camp to discuss the situation with Crowstar. Rainpuddle and Snowfall went back to Fireclan camp in case Forestclan was eavesdropping and decided to attack while Brightstar was away.

The Waterclan territory was all prairie. Tall, golden stalks of grass swayed in the chilly wind. It was quite damp and mud puddles hid in the brambles. Chirps of prairie birds, cries of hawks, and the squeaks of mice were plentiful across the flat landscape.

The camp was simple and clean. Dens were dug underneath large boulders, likely made by badgers or foxes long ago. A small stream trickled through the center. Kits and apprentices snatched small perch from the stream as they passed by. Elders were out in the sun sleeping or chatting. There was a group of four black kits all playing in the water.

"I've never been here before, it's a lovely camp, Sandfeather." Brightstar purred. "Thank you for allowing me to come over."

"It's no problem, Crowstar trusts you, and so do I." Sandfeather led the group over to the largest boulder. The cats in the camp all curiously peeked through the grass to watch the unfamiliar cats pass, many of their eyes trained on Brightstar. Sandfeather nodded to the entrance of a den and Brightstar entered leaving Stagleap, Dragonflight, and Goldpaw outside.

The den was deep underground. The air around her grew colder and darker. There was no light anywhere until she turned a corner. Dim yellow light shone from the end of the tunnel.

"Hello? Is there a black cat brooding down here?" Brightstar called.

"Is that who I think it is?" A deep, surprised voice rattled.

"No, I'm a fox coming to steal your fresh-kill. Who do you think I am?"

"Brightstar, what are you doing here... *In my den*?" Crowstar peered out the grove. His fur appeared shiny in the dim light.

"Sandfeather led me here. I have a question for you. Did your warriors happen to go into Fireclan territory only to be attacked by Forestclan?"

"Ha, I knew it couldn't be you that attacked us! Those rotten tree scratchers, they attacked us under the cover of darkness, we weren't sure who it was! What a relief to know that you're still an ally." Crowstar sighed heavily.

"I have absolutely no reason to attack you, featherbrain. What in Starclan's name are those lights in your den?"

"Oh, come in and I'll show you a little Waterclan secret!" Crowstar excitedly padded over to a little ball of dried grass. The ball was emitting a soft yellow light. There were multiple balls of light around the den spread out on the floor.

"You do realize that the point of keeping secrets is to benefit your clan, right?" Brightstar smacked his wagging tail with her paw. He had a giddy grin on his face, the same grin he wore when they first met. *He really hasn't changed. He got bigger and his voice deepened, but he's still Crowpaw.*

"Yeah, but this is revolutionary stuff right here. I believe secrets like this shouldn't be kept, and your clan should be the first to know." And with those words, the black tom unsheathed his claws and carefully sliced the ball open. To Brightstar's amazement, a bunch of tiny lights began to rise. *Fireflies!*

"Our medicine cat, Fireflight, made these. She got the inspiration from her name and made these little balls out of dried grass. She feeds the fireflies daily and then patches the balls back up again. After every moon, we release them back into the wild and find larvae to raise. We call them firelights!"

"Crowstar, this is incredible, thank you!" Brightstar smiled and batted at the fireflies buzzing around her ears.

"I knew you would appreciate it. If Honeystar calms down, I'll share this with him as well. But... Why do you think he lured my warriors into your territory only to attack us?"

"Were there any casualties?" Brightstar inquired. Crowstar's face fell into a sorrowful expression.

"Two warriors and an apprentice. It was a large group, I was there. They attacked under a new moon, we couldn't see them, even with our firelight."

"Forestclan has killed multiple of our warriors as well. Now he's picking a fight with another clan, what is he thinking?"

"At the next gathering, we'll ask him. Honeystar himself declared that the Wetlands were at peace, but now, I'm starting to think that it was all just a lie. We are still at war, and he's dragging all the clans in it."

~*~

Incoming Storm

The Fireclan cats returned to their camp as the sun fell. Brightstar shared the secret of firelight with Pebblepelt and Silverpaw. They went out firefly hunting that same night. Meanwhile, Brightstar cured up in her den to rest.

This dream, she was a rather small tom with unusual markings. The left side of his body was gold while the right side was blackish-brown. There was a perfect split of the two colors down his body. He was looking up at the moon, now just the shape of a kit's claw in the sky. It peered through the storm clouds and shone pale light on his body.

His short fur was drenched. Rain hammered his face, washing away the tears that fell from his golden eyes. The fresh wound over his left eye stung.

Is this really Starcan's will? To kill my kin? My parents, my mate, my kits, what more do they want? All of them, slaughtered by coyotes. What Sunstar told me was right. Starclan is brutal.

"Just let me die already! Isn't that what you want? I failed this life, there's nothing more for me here! Send me to the Dark Swamp forever, or let me start anew!" He yelled at the moon. Lightning flashed in the distance.

"Brokenheart, is that some kind of sick joke to you? What kind of name is that? You're taunting me!" There was another flash of thunder. The air began to sizzle around him. His fur stood on end as lightning hit a tree next to him.

"*COWARDS!* Just do it! You've ruined everything, *everything!"* More flashed. More thunder.

"Give me death, or give me peace!" A blinding flash filled his vision. Then, nothing.

~*~

Brightstar jumped out of her nest. Rolls of thunder shook her den. She took a moment to collect herself.

Brokenheart, his name was? That's just sad. Brightstar thought to herself, alone in her cold den. *I've seen eleven visions of my past lives already, but I still have one more to go.*

I still have yet to see how Sunstar died.

~~~

The sky was restless. The next full moon, none of the clans went to the gathering. There was a deadly freeze that was harsh enough to kill some of the trees surrounding each Forestclan camp.

Waterclan's camp was exposed once the grass withered around them. Then there was Fireclan. The water froze, and the majority of the clan's food supply was locked under the ice. Brightstar and Bronzepaw managed to take down a young doe together, supplying the clan with fresh-kill for a whole week.

However, it was too late for some. Swanwing and Eaglefeather, both elders, forfeited their meal and gave it to the younger cats instead, especially Mosskit and Frostkit, the only kits in the clan. They had made their journey to Starclan.

Greenpetal was sent back to Forestclan right as the freeze had begun with a bundle of deathberries tied to her back with straw, a gag Silverpaw came up with as a joke before Brightstar actually went through with it.

The next moon, the clans had yet another problem. The wetlands flooded everywhere. Forestclan climbed their tall pine trees while Fireclan simply went to higher ground and caught fish in the flood. Ironically, Waterclan had the most trouble with the flood. Their territory was completely underwater. The water cats were naturally tall to look over the grasses, but they still struggled to wade through the water. Fireclan had allowed them to enter their territory as a thank you for the gift of firelight.
~~~

Firelight had become more widespread in both clans. They were used to patrol and hunt at night. It already saved Silverpaw's fluffy tail from a wild boar while he was out foraging for herbs. The boar had steered clear of the light, creepily standing at the edge of the light. Poor Silverpaw was scared so badly, he accidentally left a putrid "scent trail" all the way back home.

Finally, leaf-bare had ended and Waterclan returned to their camp. Small flow buds started to sprout on bushes and trees. The temperature slowly rose day by day. The greenery of the plants slowly crept out of the ground. The scent of newborn animals was everywhere.

At last, it was time for a gathering. After two moons since the hailstorm that disrupted the last meeting, the clans will finally meet again.

Fireclan was the first to reach Willow Island with Waterclan following closely behind. Both clans had firelight balls with them. Fireclan had discovered a better way to make the balls by combining mud and tree sap and shared it with the water cats. The two leaders met at the base of the tree and were talking the night away.

Finally, the gathered cats ceased their chatter as Forestclan arrived. A single log filled with around six cats was all Forestclan had attended. Honeystar stalked to the base of the willow tree and glared at the other clan cats.

Something about him seemed off. He was a lot more tiwtchy than normal. His tail swayed and his ears swiveled at every small movement. He also seemed... bigger. His teeth and claws also appeared sharper. His eyes seemed to bulge in their sockets, giving him a manic look.

"Is he sick or something?" Crowstar whispered. Brightstar shrugged. Something was definitely not right. *How did he get that much bigger? He's almost my size!*

Honeystar growled something to one of his warriors before leaping up on top of the tree with a single, miraculous leap before yowling

at the gathered clans, calling them all for the meeting. His yowl sounded more like a bobcat scream than a caterwaul. Nearly every cat in the clearing below flattened their ears to berid the horrid sound.

"I guess we should join him?" Crowstar muttered. Brightstar and the tom climbed the tree and took their place. Honeystar did not look at either of them. The cats gathered below were all looking at him. They, too, have noticed something strange about him.

"Cats of all clans." He addressed everyone. His voice was not its usual scratchy tone. Instead, it was scratchy and deeper than Crowstar's.

"After three moons, we finally gather here underneath the Willow Tree once again. Hailstorms, freezing temperatures, and floods. Eventually..." Honeystar passed the two leaders behind him a smile. "Forestclan gets bored of peace!"

The five Forestclan cats screeched at the base of the tree. Each one of them were strangely buff and smelled horrendous. Their fur was matted and had multiple knots. The other clan cats snarled and spat at the scruffy forest cats.

Crowstar was too stunned to speak. Brightstar was also at a loss for words. The brown cat used to be a well-groomed, energetic normal-sized tom. But now, he was much larger... and scarier.

"Foxdung, What have you done? Do you really want to be enemies with both our clans?" Brightstar spat viciously. Honeystar turned his head partially to her. His eyes were slitted and cold.

"This is your last warning, Honeystar. Back down now, or face the wrath of the wetlands!"

The island went quiet, waiting for Honeystar's response. He laughed maniacally, howling like a coyote.

"*No!*" The island was in an uproar again. Brightstar could see cats from all clans watching the scene from the shores of their territory.

"Why would you want this? You've started the biggest war since

Sunstar declared war on the wetlands many generations ago! Nobody wants this, what are you going to gain but bloodshed and death?" Crowstar cried.

"I want what she desired. Starclan came to me in a dream and promised me that only I could unite the wetlands, and they gave me the power to do so!" Honeystar unsheathed his claws and scratched the tree with his long claws, digging unbelievably deep grooves. His clan cheered him on. Brightstar passed a worried look to Crowstar. They both nodded to each other and leapt down from the tree.

"What's wrong, are the little kits afraid of us? Of *me*?" Honeystar mocked them from his spot. Brightstar ignored him, but Crowstar was the one to shout back.

"You obviously idolize Sunstar, but if she were here, I bet she would tear you to shreds!" Crowstar declared before turning his back on the crazed leader to follow Brightstar. Honeystar was wheezing with amusement.

Your words couldn't be more true, Crowstar. I'm very much pissed off... Brightstar thought with both clans following her back home.

~~~

That very morning, Fireclan and Waterclan met at their border. The temporary camp Waterclan made during the flood was still intact. Together, both clans expanded upon it and lived together for a whole moon. They missed the next gathering, spending time preparing for war.

Many apprentices had become warriors. Goldpaw had become Goldheart. Bronzepaw had become Bronzetuft. And Silverpaw had carefully made his way to the Moonpool and was named Silverstripe. Mosskit and Frostkit had become apprentices, with Goldheart as Frostpaw's mentor and Bronzetuft as Mosspaw's mentor.

Elders in retirement such as Cloudstorm and Oakshade Brightstar's mother, Whiteflower to fight.
~~~

Brightstar and Crowstar worked together to organize squadrons of skilled fighters. The clan cats got along well and their relationship only grew stronger. Some Forestclan cats had made the dangerous trek to join in their efforts, afraid of Honeystar and his plans.

The majority of the refugees were queens and kits. Surprisingly, Greenpetal had been among the first to join them. She proved herself to be a wonderful fighter and had scouted a path into Forestclan territory.

Recently, Brightstar had strange dreams. She was always fighting a cat she had never seen before. She had also been seeing hallucinations in the waking world. Shadows of her past lives stalked her around dawn and dusk.

The moon was finally full and many of the strongest warriors gathered in the clan clearing. Fireclan and Waterclan had created a temporary clan to dispatch Honeystar. They were called Stormclan.

"Cats of all ages, gather together in the clearing. The time has come for us to be rid of the evil that has infiltrated our home and send them running!" Crowstar yowled uptop a weeping willow tree. Brightstar lept up to join him and nodded at him to continue.

"Tonight, we make history. Tonight, we will win this pointless war! We have come together as a mighty clan and using our wisdom and friendship, we have created tools and strategies never seen before. Hunting, fighting, battle formations, medicine, and advancements in firelight are just a few of the things we have learned. When we share values, we can advance even further. But first, we must defeat Forestclan's bloodthirsty leader and finally bring peace to the wetlands, for good!" Crowstar's speech was followed by the loudest cheers any of the clan cats ever heard.

Together, their voices echo throughout the trees, sending birds flying into the sky. Fish splashed in the water, adding to the sound. Nearly every cat joined the fight whether they were elders or queens. Elders in decent health joined the warriors while queens and elders in poorer health joined the medicine cats and learned to treat battle wounds. Kits were hidden away by two queens, one from Fireclan and Waterclan, away from the impending fight. Every

single cat was in this fight together.

Brightstar waited for the cheering to die down a little before announcing battle plans. The fight was taking place along the sandy Fireclan shoreline.

"Crowstar and I will charge down the middle of the beach with our best warriors to face the full force of Forestclan. Meanwhile, Rainpuddle will lead one group while Sandfeather leads the other. Both will charge in from the sides during the battle leaping out of the swamp, flaking and overwhelming Forestclan. It's a simple plan, but if we use all our strength, we might be able to do this without any deaths." Brightstar announced, surveying the cats below her. "Your group has already been assigned, listen for your name and where you will be. If you want to be somewhere else, please speak with the deputies for arrangements."

"Brightstar, a moment, please?" It was Pebblepelt. She was nodding her head to the medicine cat den where Silverstripe was waiting. Brightstar allowed Pebblepelt to escort her deep inside the den away from potential eavesdroppers.

"Remember what Honesystar said at the gathering, about how Starclan promised him the wetlands if he fought for it? What do you think that meant?" Pebblepelt spoke first, wrapping her tail around her paws.

"Well, I'm not sure. He also said that Starclan granted him power. He was much larger than any other time I've seen him. There's no way Starclan will let him take over, right? Sunstar already attempted to take over the Wetlands only to be repelled by Waterclan and Forestclan. History is repeating itself, but why?" Brightstar pondered. An expression crossed Silverstripe's muzzle.

"Could the Dark Swamp speak to cats like Starclan can? Do you think he's been manipulated?" Silverstripe exclaimed.

"Don't be mad, but I told him about your past lives and he has had this theory ever since Honeystar went wild." Pebblepelt side mouthed.

"Go on," Brightstar nodded.

"If the Dark Swamp really is speaking to Honeystar and is giving him power that is making him so large and scary, the same thing might've happened to Sunstar."

"That's quite the conspiracy, but I wouldn't be surprised. If my past lives had the audacity to interrupt a Starclan ritual, I'm sure other cats in the Dark Swamp could sabotage the peace." Brightstar groaned.

"It's possible, right? I'm sorry, this sounds very dumb. I just thought about it one night and told Pebblepelt about it!" Silverstripe whimpered.

"Did you say it as a joke?" Brightstar asked.

"...Maybe." Silverpelt murmered.

"He even asked before he knew about the connection between you and Sunstar!" Pepplebelt laughed and licked Silverstripe's ear.

"I should also mention that I've met another Dark Forest cat that managed to reach me in Starclan before Sunstar did. He came to warn me, and he also said that Sunstar and her other lives are the rulers of the Dark Swamp, I wonder what he meant by that." Brightstar pondered and flicked her tail.

"How many visions have you had of your past lives?" Pebblepelt asked.

"I've seen eleven of them, all of them except Sunstar."

"Perhaps she'll show you an answer tonight?"

Starclan's Will

~*~

"Sunpool, how many times do I have to tell you that you need to discard prey bones after eating them and not hide them in your nest?" Her mother, Moonclaw, growled and swiped at her with an extended claw. Sunpool hissed and bared her fangs.

"Don't you show those *pathetic* teeth at me, *runt*!" Moonclaw spat at her and headbutted her daughter, forcing the small golden warrior to fall to the ground. Her black-brown stripes that trailed down her back were covered in dirt. The commotion brought out the clan's leader, Sparkstar.

"Moonclaw! As the deputy, you should know better not to fight with your clanmates!" The orange stepped in between the snarling she-cats.

"She can't catch any prey, she can't kill anything with her tiny body! I told her to become a medicine cat, but she never listens to me!" Moonclaw complained.

Sunpool sighed and slipped through the brambles surrounding the camp, ignoring the two arguing cats. *Why was I born like this, the smallest cat in any of the clans? I want to be a warrior, I will never be a medicine cat!"* She thought furiously as she stomped past scent marks and into unmarked territory. Beyond the wetlands was a large delta that led to a creek. Perhaps she can make a home there, alone and happy.

It was nearly twilight when she made it to the creek. She often went beyond the borders to be alone and away from her stupid mother. The angry beige tabby had always disliked her only daughter. Her father was a strong, respectable warrior. Why was she so small? Starclan must hate her!

"We don't hate you, Sunpool." A voice slipped through the trees

from across the water. Sunpool arched her back and fluffed her tail.

"No need to be afraid, come across the water. There's something you must see." The voice whispered. Not knowing what else to do, Sunpool leaped across the creek to the other side and pushed her way through the thicket.

"Yes, check in the mud. There's a message for you." Sunpool looked around to find a large mud puddle. She slipped her front paws under the mud and felt something hard. She dug through the mud and grabbed something huge. She pulled with all her might before she dislodged the object before being thrown backwards.

She took a moment to collect herself and stand up. Her golden eyes looked in front of her. There in front of her was the largest cat skull she had ever seen. Some of the fur and flesh was still attached to the shining white bone. Its beautiful gold and black fur glistened in the evening light, almost as if it were glowing.

"Do you want to be strong?" The voice asked.

"Yes!" Sunpool responded immediately.

"We can make you stronger, as strong as this leopard once was, the giant that used its mighty strength to escape from twolegs and live in this creek for the rest of its life.. You can become a force of nature. All you need to do is to become the leader of Fireclan and unite all the clans by any means necessary, even if you must break the warrior code in any way."

"Wait, why do I have to do that? And what do you mean break the warrior code, do you mean killing someone?" Sunpool gasped.

"This is an utmost emergency. The clans are going to destroy each other one day. You must take our offer, or you will die with them. And yes, kill if you must. We will understand, and so will the cat you killed."

"O-okay. I'll do it. If it's Starclan's will, I will do whatever it takes!" Sunpool declared.

"Yes, Sunpool. You are the chosen one. We will give you all you

need, right here, right now. When you accomplish your goal, we will award you with nine lives." The voice grew louder. Sunpool suddenly felt her flesh and bones prickle with energy. A cold feeling sized her body, shaking her to the core. She screamed with agony, the icy feeling piercing through her brittle body.

"Return home, and berid the deputy that abused you, that looked down upon you. It's her time to join Starclan, otherwise, she will be the cat that destroys the clans." The voice commanded her. At last, the warmth returned to her body and she made her way back home, feeling confident for the first time in her life.

***

It is Starclan's will... It is Starclan's will... Sunpool reminded herself. She felt much stronger than a moon ago. Starclan speaks to her every dawn and dusk, reminding her of what she must do. She had grown twice her size within the past moon. Her fangs and claws grow sharper by the day. Her beautiful, unscarred fur glistened in the moonlight, a silver claw in the cloudless sky.

She crept on silent paws into the warriors den, something she had never been able to do before. She used to be the noisiest creature in the swamp, but now, she was deadly silent.

She approached her sleeping mother. Her huge muscles shone through her short, beige fur. Battle scars left the skin on her throat open and free from fur. Sunpool looked down at her claws. They were now too long to be retracted and gleamed meanicingly.

It is Starclan's will... It is Starclan's will... She continued to tell herself. She shakily lifted both her claws in front of Moonclaw's throat. *It is Starclan's will...*

SLAM! Both her claws slammed down. Moonclaw was awoken by the force... and the pain. Her white eyes met with Sunpool's own. She tried to speak, but couldn't even wheeze. *It is Starclan's will...*

Moonclaw struggled, bucking and smacking her paws against the heaving beast above her. She managed to lash out and slash her daughter's left eye, but Sunpool felt no pain. Her silent struggles

begane to fade.

It is Starclan's will...

~*~

Must unite clans, must kill all that oppose. It is Starclan's will. They chose me above all others. A few lives for all. It is Starclan's will.

At a gathering, the leaders of forestclan and waterclan asked her what she was thinking. Her gold eyes glittered.

"I want to be strong. I want to be feared. I want all the kits who laughed at me to cower whenever they see me. I want their respect and loyalty. I will lead my clanmates into wars and conquer new lands." Sunstar responded simply.

She was enormous, possibly the largest cat to ever walk in the wetlands. She started to call herself Sunstar. Waterclan and Forestclan had united and started to call themselves Floodclan.

They go against me. They will die. They will fall. It is Starclan's will.

Her fellow clanmates were the size of kits compared to her. She had became the leader after Sparkstar named her deputy... and murdered him in his den, killing him every time he was revived. Meanwhile, her mother's sister had two kits but died while she kitted. Sunstar claimed them as her own and, as they grew older, mentored both of them in the ways of her rule.

The golden cat had also made a crown from bones of the leopard skull and other cats that defied her. She wore the crown during battles, frightening any who saw it. In fact, her own clan was terrified of her. What could they do against a cat chosen by Starclan to rule the wetlands? They only followed her because she was blessed. *It is Starclan's will.*

Now, she stood on Fireclan's shore with her warriors. Floodclan faced her, standing against her with the lake behind their backs. They believe that Starclan did not bless her. She was a power hungry cat in their eyes. They will pay for their insolence. *It is Starclan's will. They spoke to me. They gave me the power to strike all of*

you down. Once I have nine lives, I will be unstoppable.

They charged her head on. She was brutal and struck down cats one by one. Nobody was safe from her bloody illusion. She was covered in red. Red that wasn't from her. She had full faith that Starclan would protect her through the battle.

That was, until a black Waterclan cat struck her, their claws barely scratching her jugular, but just enough for her to bleed violently. A torrent of red liquid gushed from the tiny wound.

Sunstar laughed at the feeble attempt to kill her. She slammed the black tom on the ground. *I'll survive this. I'll survive anything you throw at me. I will survive! I will RULE! It is Starclan's w-*

She fell over, feeling faint. She got up, only to fall over and over again. She snarled, raging and clawing the ground in front of her.

Sunpool, stay down. We will help you. There was a soft whisper in her head. The sun was starting to rise, sending its reflection across the lake's surface. Sunstar looked up at the remaining stars in the sky.

"Starclan, why did you fail me? I'm dying. You promised!" She screeched as her life poured out from her.

Yes, we failed you. The cats of the Dark Swamp have infiltrated our ranks and tricked you. Don't worry, we will fix what you have wronged. You will have another chance to redeem yourself. You will never rest in peace the way you currently are, corrupted by evil.

"NO! IMPOSSIBLE! YOU PROMISED! YOU FAILED, FAILED!" Sunstar shouted, partially to Starclan for letting the Dark Swamp deceive her... and partially to herself for falling for it.

You will have a second chance. You can have a third, fourth, fifth, however many you need to put your mind at ease, Sunpool. You will live freely... one day.

Sunstar wheezed and fell over for the last time. Her eyes were closed. She didn't care what was going to happen to her. Starclan never cared. They never will. They weren't helping her, they were punishing her!

It is Starclan's will..?

~*~

United

The plan was set in motion. It was midnight. Brightstar and Crowstar were leading Stormclan by the sandy shoreline. Many of the cats wore vines tied around their necks with tiny firelight balls dangling from the threads, including the two leaders. In the back of the line were the medicine cats and volunteers.

Far behind them, the two secret groups led by the deputies had no firelight and relied on any signals the leader's group passed on. The medicine cats, Pebblepelt, Silverstripe, and Fireflight were in charge of giving them the signal to ambush Forestclan.

Brightstar had her mind reeling from last night that Sunstar showed to her. Could the same thing really be happening to Honeystar? Sunstar is convinced that Sunstar is punishing her with reincarnation. Could Brightstar really rest in peace if she keeps failing to save her friends and family? *No. I would hate that.*

Whatever happened tonight could at last decide her fate. Sunstar had immense power and easily dispatched any cat that opposed her. Honeystar and what seems to be five other Forestclan cats have similar abilities as Sunstar. The plan Brightstar had in mind could either go well and prevent any Stormclan cats from major casualties or even zero deaths, or go terribly, terribly wrong.

Honeystar is the main target. The five similar Forestclan cats will be ambushed by the deputy's groups while Crowstar and Brightstar aim to separate Honeystar from his clan, losing lives if they must.

In Brightstar's vision last night, she had learned that cats from the dark Swamp cannot give lives and can only give power, meaning that they only had to kill Honeystar twice. With Brightstar's three lives and Crowstar's eight, they had a good chance to end the fight quickly.

They stood besides the lake. Dark shadows from down the shoreline peeked out from the trees in the pale moonlight. The shadows

approached, one clearly bigger than all the rest.

"That's got to be him!" Somebody whispered behind Brightstar. It was Greenpetal whispering to Bronzetuft.

"He's gotten so big much too quickly. This can't be Starclan's doing, they would never allow this to happen." Bronzetuft hissed under his breath.

"But... who else can do something like that?" Greenpetal shivered.

"Something or someone with similar powers to Starclan, that's what. I'll try not to think about it so I'll be able to sleep tonight."

"If we make it out alive after this fight."

"We will."

At last they were in sight of Forestclan. Honeystar had outgrown Brightstar since the last gathering, rivaling Sunstar's size. All of his teeth were long and crooked. His claws were long and hooked downwards.

"This is it, do or die." Crowstar hissed.

"I prefer the former." Brightstar lifted her head to meet Honeystar's eyes. They were across a long length of sand, but his gaze felt much closer than he was.

"Whenever you're ready, Brightstar," Crowstar said.

"We'll send him to the Dark Swamp where he came from!" Brightstar declared before charging forward, yelling out the fiercest caterwaul she could manage. Crowstar and Stormclan followed suit, drumming their paws on the sand as they moved.

The moment they moved, Forestclan's ranks surged forth. They were outnumbered, but six cats had supernatural strength. Sunstar was capable of fighting off multiple skilled warriors. If Stormclan's plan fails, there will be many, *many* deaths.

Reflections of cats darted across the water's surface. The stars

overhead glistened and the full moon shone in the cloudless sky. The snarls and yowling of cats eoched all around them. The two clans were closing the gap between them quickly. Warriors of Forestclan smiled and stuck their tails in the air like flags, confident that victory would be theirs.

Brightstar was right in front of Honeystar. He flexed his claws and held his ground, expecting her to lunge at him. *That's what you think, mangled furball.*

Brightstar did something she had never done before. She darted to the right, avoiding the enemy. Crowstar was right behind her and did the same, but to the left. Honeystar was dumbfounded and stood in the same spot as Stormclan whisked him, their battlecries carried on the wind.

The two Stormclan leaders flanked him and, at the same time, pounced at his side, scratching at his matted brown fur.

The brown tom snarled furiously, snapping backwards and attempting to fend off the attackers. He was unable to reach any of the two cats.

Brightstar used her brute strength to grab his scruff and hold him still while Crowstar moved to the front of the snarling tom. Honeystar lashed out his hooked claws, unable to move his head.

Crowstar gritted his teeth and ducked underneath Honeystar. The angry tom's claws snagged through Crowstar's shiny black fur. The black cat screamed in agony before snapping his jaws around Honeystar's throat and easily piercing his jugular.

Brightstar held onto his scruff tightly as the huge cat withered. Her strained muscles screamed at her to let go, but she only tightened her grip.

At last, the large brown feline went limp. Crowstar tumbled backwards and sat on his haunches and Brightstar dropped Honeystar's heavy body. Both of them were painting intensely. *One life down, one more to go. This is where the plan could go wrong.*

Crowstar was staring at the bite marks on Honeystar's neck. His jaw was opened, not wanting to taste the coppery liquid that lined his teeth. *This might be his first kill, poor featherbrain.*

"Nice work." Brightstar gsaped. Crowstar didn't respond, only nodding his head slightly. The sounds of the raging battle surrounded them.

Honeystar's wounds were almost healed and Brightstar got ready to grab him again. Her golden eyes were narrowed into slits as she anticipated her enemy's next breath.

Something heavy knocked into her side. She snarled and instinctively lashed out her long claws at her opponent's exposed face. The giant cat cried and fell off her as claws raked his face. She got up on all fours again and arched her back. She was only an ear taller than the unfamiliar dark brown Forestclan cat that abruptly charged her.

She was distracted by Crowstar's sudden yelling. He too was ambushed by a large Forestclan warrior and was struggling under their weight. Brightstar immediately lunged at the Forestclan cat attacking her friend, but yet another large Forestclan cat barreled into her.

Aggravated, she snapped her canines on the cat's leg and shook it forcefully. The new cat's wail rang in her ears as something snapped underneath her teeth. She kicked the white cat off her and continued her rescue.

She was too late. Crowstar was on the ground with a tan forest cat towering over him. *Where are they coming from? Where is Rainpuddle and Sandfeather? They were supposed to fend them off! Nonono, it's all falling apart!*

She was surrounded by five warriors. They were each only slightly smaller than her, but their eyes were crazed with power. They were each different colors. Dark brown, white, tan, red, and beige. Crowstar was on the ground with Honeystar, none of them yet showing signs of life.

She was alone against five superpowered cats, and there was no way she was gonna lose.

She leaped at the white warrior with the broken front leg. *Best to injure them until they can't fight, I shouldn't bother wasting too much time on a single confrontation. First, this she-cat, then the dark brown one.*

Brightstar was quick. Despite her size, she danced on light paws. She undercut the white she-cat and even dodged the red warrior biting at her from the side. She sank her fangs in white cat's unbroken paw.

The white cat screeched and batted at the golden cat's face, but her struggles were futile. Brightstar had managed to break her other leg even worse than the last one. She was unable to fight or move with her front legs and tumbled on her back.

The red warrior took his chance to scrape his claws on Brightstar's backside. She turned around to face him. *Forget the brown one, this fleabag is itching for a pounding!*

She sliced her claws right down his snout, leaving a wound that split his face. He reeled back and shook his head. The tan tabby that slaughtered Crowstar took his place. Her claws were the sharpest of the five and were covered in fresh blood.

Brightstar ducked in between two snarling felines and made a mad dash towards her fallen friend. *Crowstar, get your stupid fluffy self up!*

She got a chance to look at the battle. Goldheart was fighting with Bronzepaw and Greenpetal nearby.

"Goldheart, over here!" Brightstar commanded. Her sister spun around and saw the large forest cats on her tail. Goldheart yowled something at her brother and Greenpetal. Together, the three of them smashed into the forest cats.

"Where is Rainpuddle and Sandfeather? They should be out here by now!" She spat. *The medicine cats were in charge of the signal by releasing thousands of fireflies out from firelight balls. Did something*

happen? Greenpetal was the one to confirm her suspicions.

"The medicine cats were ambushed and they had to fall back. They are safe and should send the signal any moment now!" The white forest cat squealed.

"Go find Sandfeather and tell him to charge. Bronzetuft will find Rainpuddle. Goldheart will find the medicine cats and look for injured warriors. Make sure none of you are followed, Is that clear?"

Without another word, the three cats dispelled at once, leaving Brightstar alone again. Three of the large cats each followed after the three Stormclan warriors. Brightstar was now only facing two. The dark brown tom and the tan tabby. *Finally, my chance!*

She splayed her claws and stuck them to the tan warrior's neck. The tabby bit at empty air, doing anything she could to throw off the golden cat.

The tom bit down on her right leg and managed to pull her off his ally. Unfortunately for him, Brigthstar was expecting him to do so. Before he could react, she sank her teeth into the back of his neck. Flesh and bone crunched underneath her iron grip. The tom's scream was deafening.

When she was sure she had caused a fatal wound, she turned her attention back to the tan warrior. The tabby was breathing heavily and crouched low to the ground. Liquid spilled from her jugular. *That was an accident, but I'll take it. Less fighting for me.*

Something stabbed the back of her neck. She snarled and threw herself backwards, but was unable to throw the attacker off. It was the same hold Honeystar had on her when she was a young warrior. Lionfur had saved her from death that day. But this time, he wasn't here. Nobody was.

~*~

'She shot up. Her claws flexed anxiously. It was quiet. The sounds of battle were gone. *What-*

"I didn't think it was possible. It only took a super beefy scruffball to

take down Brightstar, huh?" A pure golden tom materialized in front of her, laughing hysterically. Brightstar scrunched her muzzle.

"Lionfur, knock it off!" A white she-cat with golden spots dappled on her coat gently bit her little furball's ear. Brightstar's jaw was agape with shock.

"Mother? Did you-?"

"Yes, I have." Whiteflower approached Brightstar and lifted her head to touch noses with her.

"Is anyone else here from the fight?"

"Just a few of the other elders. And you." Her mother playfully mocked her huge kit.

"Where is Crowstar? Is he here?" Brightstar looked around her. Many other Starclan cats were looking at a ghostly figure of a large golden warrior in the back of the crowd. The figure was standing next to the misty silhouette of a black cat.

"No, he left right before you came here."

"What's that?" Brightstar tilted her head.

"You and Crowstar lost a life. So did Honeystar, but his soul isn't here." Rosepaw spoke and pressed her nose against her sister's fur. "None of us were able to get in contact with him ever since the Dark Swamp first got to him after he killed Flamestar."

"So... Dark Swamp cats are the cause of all this?"

"Afraid so. Starclan was able to talk to Sunstar before she died, maybe he can be reached somehow." It was Stormwhisker's turn to speak. Her parent's tails were twined together.

"I was told your story." Whiteflower breathed. "It's quite... startling."

"I'm sure it was, finding out your kit was a supervillain." Brightstar purred. She finally felt comfortable enough to joke about her past life.

"Is it time to go back yet?" The golden cat stomped her paws and began to pace back and forth.

"Yup." A black cat said beside her. "Good luck, that's all I can say!"

"You've got to be kidding me, Crowstar."

"Hello!" He laughed nervously as the gold cat loomed over him.

"I can't believe you sometimes. You better come back quicker this time!"

"Hey, be careful. None of the deputies arrived yet. I managed to finish off the red warrior, but the white and the beige warrior are still alive along with Honeystar, of course. I've got six lives left, but you've got, what eight?"

"*Actually...*" Brightstar sighed.

"What did you do?" Crowstar growled nervously.

"Long story short, my leader ritual was interrupted by cats from the Dark Swamp and I've only got two left." Brightstar said. Crowstar's jaw dropped. "So, stop dying before I kill you myself, I don't have many left. Perhaps these lovely Starclan cats can explain... *everything*."

"Unbelievable!" Crowstar stumbled.

"Brightstar, it's time to go back." Flamestar spoke. His eyes were alight with determination. Brightstar nodded.

"Take care of yourself out there, Brightstar," Crowstar muttered before her vision grew brighter.

~*~

The Final Fight

Feeling a little nauseous, she stumbled to her feet and lightly shook her head. A sharp ringing sensation pierced her skull as the sounds of battle filled her senses.

"Brightstar!" Pebblepelt cried. Silverstripe was next to her, blinking with startled surprise.

"What?" She rumbled.

"You died, that's what!" Silverstripe snapped his tail from side to side. "You don't have many chances left. Crowstar isn't doing very well without you."

"Where is he?"

"Right here!" Pebblepelt moved slightly to the left to show her leader the black tom with the torn stomach.

"Ouch, what a way to go." Brightstar winced.

"Honeystar retreated to the back of Forestclan lines right after he killed you, likely expecting another ambush like before. There's no telling what's going through his mind anymore." Pebblepelt uttered.

"How did you get me here underneath the trees in the thick of battle?"

"Goldheart cleared a way by using her wit. As we speak, Bronzetuft and Greenpetal are going to tell deputies to attack. I'm sorry we couldn't do it ourselves, Fireflight got separated from us and she had the firelight ball with the signal." Pebblebelt whimpered.

"That's fine, we still have a chance to win this. Once Crowstar is up, we'll wait for the deputies to charge in, then we shall command the fresh warriors to push into Forestclan territory so we can finally end this war!" Brigthstar declared.

"Cheers to that, Brightstar," Crowstar mumbled and lifted his head. There was an ugly scar across his neck and underbelly.

"Look who decided to take my advice and wake up faster."

"Hmph!" Crowstar pouted with a smile creeping across his muzzle.

***

Eventually, The two groups leaped out from the trees, surprising the Forestclan cats. Rainpuddle and Snowfall were side-by-side. Dragonflight was with his brother, Robinfeather. Chimesong was with Icefoot. Skysong and Shadowshade were dragging injured warriors to the medicine cats. And... *no way, is that Firetail and Orchidflower?* She couldn't believe her eyes, but the two outcasted warriors were fighting with Stormclan.

Brightstar pelted through the thick of the fray with Crowstar at her tail. They raced past screeching felines and into Forestclan territory only to be tackled by the beige warrior. The large white she-cat had both her front legs broken, but her teeth were still plenty sharp to slice apart anyone that crossed her.

Brightstar kicked at the beige warrior's underbelly with her muscular legs. Crowstar was easily countering the white warrior's pitiful attacks.

Brightstar managed to slice through the beige warror's sensitive underbelly with her claws, shearing the skinny flesh open. The forest cat winced and shouted curses at the golden cat before collapsing on the ground.

Crowstar was struggling to find an opening to dispatch the white warrior. Once she saw Brightstar charging at her, it was too late. She grabbed the warrior by the scruff and threw her against a tree. Her neck cleany snapped backwards and she crumpled on the forest floor.

"Wow, nice one!" Crowstar painted.

"Come on, Honeystar must be nearby!" Brightstar urged her friend.

"There's no need to look." The enormous honey-brown leader stalked out of the undergrowth. "It's a pity my five strongest warriors couldn't get rid of you, but I sure can!"

"Yeah, right, come at us, forest kit!" Crowstar yowled.

Honeystar's lips drew back, revealing his long, crooked yellow teeth. Crowstar arched his back and fluffed his tail while Brighstar circled around the crazed tom like a predator stalking its prey.

Faster than she could react, Honeystar lunged at her and scratched the side of her head. She spat at him and threw him over her back. Crowstar surged forward and sunk his claws into the tom's side. Honeystar used his size to throw himself into a tumbling frontflip, throwing both cats off.

His target was solely on Brightstar. He bit into her shoulder, crunching bones under the pressure. She yowled in his ear, attempting to distract him. He momentarily flinched and she tore him off.

They were in another face-off. Crowstar was behind Honeystar and waited for the right moment to pounce. All three leaders flexed their claws and watched each other carefully. Seeing an opportunity, Crowstar ducked underneath the giant cat and flipped over onto his own back, digging all of his claws from all four legs into Honeystar's underbelly.

Honeystar screeched, a horrendous, high pitched sound. Brightstar snagged his scruff and threw him down. Crowstar stumbled backwards as Honeystar lashed out with his claws, but not before a claw hooked him in his left eye. Brightstar released tension on Honeystar's neck and he was able to buck her off. She tumbled in the dirt, snapping large branches as she rolled.

Crowstar was stumbling around with his left eye bloodied and scratched. Honeystar stabbed his claws through Brightstar's abdomen and, using his hooked claws, pulled downward and spilled dark red blood on the green leaves. Brightstar convulsed as Honeystar pushed her on the ground. She was dimly aware of Crowstar yelling something. *Great, here we go again. I just hate losing*

a fight!

~*~

She was back in the quiet landscape of Starclan. She spat out curses as she scratched the nonexistent ground in frustration. *I've got one more chance to get this. I hope Crowstar can hold up until I get back.*

While she was thinking up a plan, she heard her close friends and family begin to shout her name and sing her encouragement. She wrinkled her nose for a moment before returning to her thoughts.

Then there were more shounts. A lot more. The once-quiet area was filled with cats cheering her name. *By the stars, what is happening?*

"Don't give up yet!"

"Brightstar, keep your head up high!"

"You got this!"

"This is your chance!"

"Show them what you're made of!"

For a brief moment, Brightstar turned her head with the hint of a sorrowful smile on her face. Cats she never even met were cheering for her success. She even recognizes some cats from her past lives, calling out her *old* names.

Windwhisp, Lilystep, Spottedwing, Iceheart, Citruspelt, Skyrose, Rivershore, Wrenstar, Sparrowflight, and even her very first mother, Moonclaw, was cheering her on.

Brightstar turned away with a giddy grin on her muzzle and wiped her face with her paws. Surely, even if she failed, she would be satisfied with this life?

Still, what would it be like to live a peaceful, normal life of a warrior without war? What about the cats lost in the Dark Swamp that don't belong there, like Ivyheart? Who is tricking cats and giving them powers? There's still so much I want to do and find out! I want to live!

~*~

Crowstar was nowhere to be found. She was resting on soft green ferns caked with dried blood. She hastily stood up and looked around her. She saw moonlight shine through the trees, threatening to disappear behind the horizon.

She stuck her nose to the ground and opened her mouth like Snowfall. *Help me find them, Ivyheart.*

She found a scent! It was the sweet prairie scent of her friend and the bitter scent of Honeystar. *They went out of the trees back onto the shoreline.*

With all the speed she could muster, she pulled herself up a tree and began leaping across branches, following the direction of the smell. Once she finally saw the lake, she peered down to the battle. Nearly every cat in the wetlands was here fighting for what they believed in. The white sand was covered in fur and stained crimson.

She finally found Crowstar. His pelt was battered and dusty. He stood next to Stormclan warriors, all of them surrounding Honeystar. Every now and then, a warrior would faint an attack. They charged at Honeystar only to bail at the last second, almost as if they were distracting him. She could see the medicine cats at the edge of the fight with firelight balls flickering at the edge of the lake.

Brightstar noticed that every Stormclan cat was looking around, mainly at the treeline where she was at. *By the stars, are they looking for me?*

Brightstar decided to yowl out her best battlecry. Only now did she realize that no matter what life she was living, she always had the same cry from Sunpool.

Heads shot up and the fighting momentarily ceased. Her golden eyes seem to blaze under the starlight. She soared down from the tree and dashed across the shore, kicking up sand with his massive paws. Her clan began to joyfully wail as they saw the golden cat streak by.

Honeystar clenched his claws and turned to face the noise. Brightstar used the cats as cover to conceal her location and stuck low to the ground. She signaled something with her tail as she passed Rainpuddle.

The gray cat understood and started to run in the opposite direction away from the leader. She kicked up sand, catching Honeystar's attention. As he was turned away with his back facing Brigthstar, the gold cat made her move. Crouching low to the ground, she wiggled her hips before bounding down a clear lane towards her unaware enemy.

He was facing away when Brightstar knocked him off his paws. Honeystar screamed and tried to reach her with his claws. She rolled sideways, avoiding his attack. While the tom tried to get back on his pads, she had already begun her assault. She ran in close, scratched him somewhere, then retreated. She kept him on the ground, spitting curses at her.

"Starclan choose me, you'll never win!" Honeystar snarled. Brightstar snickered and continued to attack. However, one strike wasn't where she wanted it to be. Honeystar had been slowly moving his back paws underneath his body and he launched himself into the air. Brightstar leaped up to meet him midair, much to his surprise.

Brightstar used her haunches to slam him in the underbelly, sending him tumbling on the ground and sand flew everywhere, burying the forest cat. As Brightstar landed, his claws swiftly flew out from underneath the sand pile, striking Brightstar's chest and leaving a huge wound.

Her clanmates didn't worry about the wound, for they only cheered louder. Stormclan and Forestclan cats alike were all watching the furious cats duke it out.

Her chest ached and liquid waterfalled out from the crevice. She snarled and snapped her jaw on Honeystar's front leg. His muscles were unnaturally thick as she crunched down. Adrenaline coursed through her body, allowing her to rip apart the tissues protecting his bones. Honeystar screeched and tried to pull away. Sand coated

his long fur as he unburied himself.

The leg finally tore away from her teeth, mangled and broken. Now Brightstar knew where she had to strike next. His neck was far too thick to cut through. She would aim for the stomach.

Honeystar limped sidewards, his good leg facing Brightstar. His expression was no longer jubilant, but was now stucken with panic. She ignored the pain exploding in her chest and pounced, both of them rolling over in a yowling ball of fur.

Brightstar seized her moment. She dug her long, overgrown claws, then her entire paws, underneath Honeystar's rib cage and, with all the strength she could muster, tore downwards.

Honeystar opened his maw to scream, but couldn't muster a single sound. Brightstar fell back as the tom stumbled around, his manic eyes staring blankly at the leftover stars as the sun rose. Brightstar had her back to the light and her golden fur glittered.

Finally, he fell. Brightstar whooped with victory, her clan immediately joined in. Cats of Stormclan hugged each other, even some Forestclan cats joined in, relieved that the war was over... although glorious, the celebration was short-lived.

She collapsed under her shaking legs and onto her back, her golden eyes facing the dawn sky. She didn't feel pain. She didn't feel anything. Her vision was tunneled and her hearing was quickly fading. She just knew she was exhausted. She also knew... she was smiling.

I did it, Sunstar. You better be happy now.

Hundreds of cats swarmed her with her friends above her, looking down with tearful gazes, with Crowstar yowling something at the sky. Silverstripe was the only cat with a dry face. She made eye contact with his sister and nodded gently to her.

Huh, look at that. I saved the clans. I'm sure Sunstar is happy about that, finally being recognized as a hero. But... Is this ending what I truly desire? Nearly all lives after the Sunstar weren't really trying to do

anything special. They just wanted to live out a normal life of a warrior. She took a shuddering breath, realizing something. *The reason Starclan killed each life off was to reincarnate them when they believed disaster would happen. It wasn't a punishment, but a huge misunderstanding. Starclan was helping all along, Pebblepelt was right.*

Am I satisfied yet? I'm not really sure. She was aware of her clanmates shouting her name. Her siblings, friends, and the shining cats of Starclan all looked down on her. She spotted familiar faces, and among them were her past lives and a giddy Ivyheart among the ranks. She felt peaceful, yet something still bothered her.

Is this what I want? Kept repeating in her mind as she closed her eyes to fall back asleep for the thirteenth time... hopefully for good.

Aftermath

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Nearly twelve moons have passed. All three clans were once again at peace for the first time ever since Honeystar accused Flamestar's warrior of trassassing in Forestclan territory. Brightpaw's very first gathering with her siblings, mentor, and parents. She met a great friend and ally from Waterclan that night that would eventually help her defeat the honey-brown tom in the largest battle since Sunstar's ancient war nearly three hundred moons ago.

Waterclan's leader, deputy, and medicine cat all survived the war. Forestclan's former leaders, however, have all died. The medicine cat had hidden with Stormclan during the fight.

It was dusk at the Fireclan camp. The spray of stars in the evening sky glittered brightly. Rainstar was busy organizing the patrols for the next morning with Dragonflight. The white tom had been an excellent deputy, showing the same leadership skills as his late mentor.

Shadowshade, Chimesong, Robinfeather, and Skysong had returned to camp with fish in their jaws. Mossspot and Frostwhisker were feeding the elders, Cloudstorm and Stagleap before they left for night patrol with Snowfall and Rainstar.

Icefoot was grooming his brother, Firetail.

A good bunch of Forestclan cats have joined Waterclan or Fireclan. Firetail and Orchidflower had joined Fireclan after the battle. Greenpetal had joined Fireclan to be with Bronzetuft. Silverstripe just left the nursery with Goldheart as Pebblepelt padded to the entrance, rubbing their pelts as they passed by.

Orchidflower was outside the nursery with Flamekit and Poppykit. The two red kits were wrestling by the waterside. Pebblepelt snickered as she entered the nursery.
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Bronzetuft was squished in the corner of the nursery besides Greenpetal. Tucked in a bed of white flowers was their kit.

"How is she doing? Did you think of a name?" Pebblepelt purred quietly.

"She's wonderful. We don't have a name yet. Bronzetuft suggested Whitekit, but she isn't exactly white. Then, he suggested Brightkit after Brightstar, but I don't think she looks like a Brightstar!" Greenpedal chuckled.

Now that Pebbplepelt was closer to the kit, she could see that the she-cat had a gold pelt and large white spots all around her body. The tip of her tail was dark black. The right side of her face was split down the center and colored white while her other half was a golden tabby with a similar swirly pattern to her aunt, Goldheart.

"What an adorable, odd kit!" Pebblepelt gasped with her eyes widening.

"I think she's piebald like my older brother. How about Ivykit? No, Ivyheart was brown and had green eyes." Greenpetal shook her head.

"She doesn't have green eyes? Well, I guess that makes sense considering Fireclan never had a cat with green eyes before." Pepplepelt pondered. "What color are her eyes?"

"Take a look!" Bronzetuft's tail was wagging excitedly. Pebblepelt laughed and scooted closer to the kit and gently nudged the little feline with her paw.

The kit growled as if she was unhappy being woken from her nap. She yawned and arched her back. Before settling back in her little nest.

"Come on, little kit, open your eyes, little one!" Pebblepelt thrilled.

The little kit made another growling sound and stubbornly kneaded the ground in front of her. Pebblepelt sighed and looked back at the parents.

"She's a stubborn one, she should be fun for your first kit!" Pepplepelt smiled before waving goodbye to two young warriors. They were beginning to talk about names again.

As Pebblepet looked back to say something snarky, the kit had her head up. Her ears were perked in Pebblepelt's direction, curiously listening to the medicine cat's purr. Pebblepelt made eye contact with the kit and immediately froze in place. Her right eye was a white color, but the left...

Golden.

~*~Epilogue~*~

"Just be back before nightfall, Swansong!" Rainstar purred before departing for dusk patrol with a group of cats. Snowfall, her mentor, passed her a quick smile before disappearing beyond the reads with the silver tabby.

I'm not going to be back before nightfall. Swansong smiled and sat outside the medicine cat's den. Last year, she caught greencough with both her younger sister, Brightpaw. While resting in the Medicine Cat's den, she saw something that drew her attention. A hauntingly beautiful white crown of bones. She recognized some as impossibly large cat teeth. Pale deer antlers sprung from the top. There were multiple cracks in the ancient crown, likely since it's over three hundred moons old back in Sunstar's time.

For some reason, Swansong felt as if it shouldn't be here in the camp. The beautiful crown was obviously out of place. She resisted the strange urge to bring it to her secret hiding place beyond the clan borders.

And tonight, twelve moons later, she was bringing it there. She knew that Silverstripe enjoyed foraging for herbs, often leaving the camp for the entire day. Pebblepelt was also busy with Orchidflower, who was close to kitting. *Now, this is my chance! Heheh!*

On silent paws, she snuck in the den. The comforting scent of herbs wafted around her as she padded to the back of the den. Conveniently, the crown was on the ground, sparkling in the firelight.

She gently picked up the crown from the antlers with her long teeth. The headpiece was heavy, but her large size made it easier to lift. She carried it off the ground like a mother cat grabbing her kit by the scruff and left the den. The clearing was empty at this time of day right before dusk. The warriors were in the surrounding areas, not leaving space for any intruders to sneak through.

Swansong confidently strutted through the clearing, unaware of the cat watching her. Pebblepelt smiled from the entrance of the nursery as she watched the large piebald she-cat carry the crown up a tree and out of the camp.

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At last, she smelled her scent marking by the creek. Crickets and other insects hummed in the bushes as she leapt down from the canopy, splashing into a puddle. As she was looking for a place to hide the crown, a white gleam in the undergrowth caught her eye in the golden light of the sunset. Laying the crown down on a bed of ferns, she approached the speck of light.She clawed away vines and cleaned moss off of a forming, white shape.

There it was. The leopard skull as big as her body. It was missing many teeth and the bones and was yellow-tinted. Small plants grew through the many crevices and cracks.

This... how have I never noticed this before? Can this be the same skull Sunstar found in the story? It would explain the large cat teeth on the crown, I suppose.

Something hissed in her ear. She snapped around, expecting a cat to be there. There was nothing. Yet... she felt a presence lurking nearby.

"Don't you just admire this leopard's beautiful bones? The giant teeth that can pierce through even the thickest muscles? Tell me, Swansong, wouldn't you like to feel what it's like to be a leopard?" The voice cooed in her head.

"Who's there? Hello?" Swansong was pacing around the creek and looking past the trees that surrounded her.

"I am an embassy from Starclan. The wetlands are at peace, but something is about to tear the clans apart and-"

"You're *not* from Starclan." Swansong spoke and stared blankly at the skull. The voice was eerily quiet.

"Excuse me?" It asked.

"You heard me!" Swansong stomped to the skull, her eyes now looking above it. "I can see you. Leopards aren't allowed in Starclan."

The leopard's heavy jaw dropped.

"Can- you see me?" It asked, puzzled "Nobody else has before..."

Suddenly Swansong spoke again, this time, her voice sounded different somehow.

"Did you do the same thing to Sunstar in this creek? I've heard the legend. She found a leopard skull somewhere and suddenly grew to be enormous." She growled. The leopard's face was expressionless. "How did you reach Honeystar?"

"I- I was running away from twolegs. They carried sticks that exploded. The moment after that sound, you were hit by something invisible. I must have bled while running through the forest. You're right, cat. I am responsible for what Sunstar and Honeystar did."

"But why?" Swansong asked. Now it was her turn to be puzzled.

"I was angry. I wanted others to suffer like I had at the claws of something you can't possibly fight back against. I have, however, underestimated the strength of cats. I'm stuck here, and my only enjoyment is watching your little clans tear each other apart for your little Starclan!" The leopard roared and stood over Swansong.

"You're stuck here?" Swansong said, unfazed by the leopard's aggressive movements, genuinely concerned.

"That's what I just said!" It growled.

"Why do you think you're stuck here? Do you believe you're trapped here, or do you want closure in some way?" She spoke without thinking. It was as if she somehow knew what to say. As if someone was telling her to say it, speaking through her.

"I don't have anything! Why would I keep myself here?"

"Perhaps you want something."

"What could I possibly want besides watching the clans fight?"

"I don't know, maybe somebody who understands you?"

"There's nobody that understands me, nobody likes me!"

"I do." Swanwing said. Somehow, she felt like she related to this poor creature in some way.

"YOU *DON'T!*" The big cat roared and snarled in her face. She didn't move and stared blankly at him with her mismatched eyes.

"You want to be seen. To be heard. Go ahead, I'm listening." Swanwing sat on her haunches and flicked her tail. The leopard also sat down, giving up on frightening her. His face twitched in different directions.

"I miss my mother, I didn't really see her much. The twolegs, they ruined everything for me! I hated being confined in a small cage, controlled by something I couldn't fight against. I eventually escaped their claws, but they chased me down. I had freedom,and they took it! *It's aggravating!"* The leopard suddenly opened up to the feline in front of them. Swansong was doing a therapy lesson with a fearsome seventy-pound beast. A very confused, lonely, seventy-pound beast.

"Your family is waiting for you in Silverpelt." Swansong whispered.

"How can you know about my ancestors? You have Starclan, I'm scared. I'm not sure if anything is up there... I might disappear forever." The big cat admitted.

"Everyone has a place to go, don't you feel it? I guarantee that somebody is out there, waiting patiently for you."

"Do you really think so?" The leopard made a sound that sounded like a crying kit.

"I do." Swansong smiled. The leopard looked up. The sky was ablaze with a warm scarlet color.

"Ah, that's it." The big cat closed their eyes and gently rumbled.

"What do you see?"

"My mother!"

"What are you doing here, go see her!" Swansong laughed. The leopard opened their eyes again as a smile caressed their face.

"Thank you, Swanwing. I've done terrible things to your cats. I was frightened of the world beyond this one. But now, I must leave." The leopard's figure was fading into a starry mist. Swanwing purred as the leopard launched themselves into the sky with a mighty leap before vanishing.

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She stayed long after sunset. Her clan must be wondering where she was right about now. Rainstar always counted the cats that left and came back to camp.

Swanwing had been cleaning the creek. The skull was free from plants and the crown was on its head. The skull was tucked in underneath a small branch roof she had constructed. It was time to go home.

As she was leaving the clearing, she looked back at the silent creek. This is where it all began, all because a leopard was afraid of being alone and forgotten. They just wanted someone to be with. They never wanted revenge like they believed.

Sunstar always thought she wanted to be strong, but really, she just wanted to live like any other warrior without her size holding her back. She grew angry and bitter, just like the leopard. She was driven by her own fury, unable to see what she really desired.

To be wanted.

I wonder if Sunstar is watching. Who knew all this bloodshed started with a single, lonely soul. I wish somebody found this place sooner than I did. But... How did I know what to say to that leopard? How was I able to see them? Am I special in a way, able to see things other cats cannot?

Maybe, maybe not. I'm just relieved that the leopard can rest in peace,

and probably Sunstar as well. And despite all that's happened...

I'm happy with what I have.

~*~The End~*~

~*~

[image] [image] [image]

MAJOR SPOILERS IF YOU DIDN'T READ THIS ENTIRE BOOK!

FIRECLAN

Leader

Rainstar - Longhair silver tabby with striking blue eyes. The tufts on her ears are unusually long.

Deputy

Dragonflight - A small, fluffy white tom with blazing yellow eyes.

Medicine Cats

Pebblepelt - Clever brown she-cat with spots the color of river stones.

Silverstripe - Small, skinny silver tom with brown paws and two dark gray stripes running down his back and sparkling blue eyes

Warriors

Firetail - Fluffy, long-furred ginger tabby tom with brown eyes. Scar over back.

Apprentice; Flamepaw

Icefoot - Pale white tom with one blue one brown eye.

Apprentice; Poppypaw

Chimesong - light brown tabby she-cat with brown eyes.

Shadowshade - Pure black tom with strange black eyes Scars all over body and a snapped tail.

Skysong - Silver tabby tom with white blotches and blue eyes. Scars across chest.

Robinfeather - A small, short-haired white tom with a red underbelly and yellow eyes.

Snowfall - Pretty white she-cat with golden paws and

gold flecks on her face. Yellow eyes.

Goldheart - Short-furred golden tabby she-cat with light brown eyes.

Bronzetuft - Large brown tom with white spots on his back and deep light eyes.

Mossdapple - Tortoiseshell she-cat with white paws and chest. Amber eyes.

Frostwhisker - White she-cat with blue eyes.

Swansong - Clever long-furred piebald golden tabby she-cat with a blackish-brown tail tip. One gold eye and one white. Not a single noticeable scar on her body.

Apprentice; Brightpaw

Apprentices

Brightpaw - Skinny long-furred golden tabby she-cat with sparkling green eyes.

Mentor; Swansong

Flamepaw - Dark red tom with brown eyes.

Mentor; Firetail

Poppypaw - Red she-cat with white paws, Chest, and muzzle.

Mentor; Icefoot

Queens

Greenpetal - Skinny white she-cat with a scratched face and green eyes. Mother of Ivykit.

Orchidflower - Pinkish-white she-cat with one silver and one green eye. Close to kitting.

Elders

Stagleap - Handsome brown tom with a white underbelly and white spots on back. Brown eyes.

Cloudstorm - Blue tom with blue eyes.

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WATERCLAN

Leader

Crowstar - Tall, pure black long-furred tom with icy blue eyes.

Deputy

Sandfeather - Tall, bulky tan tom with amber eyes.

Medicine Cats

Fireflight - Black she-cat with unusual red splotches and amber eyes.

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FORESTCLAN

Leader

Falconstar - A kind-hearted calico she-cat with one minty-green eye and a scratched face.

Deputy

Quailspot - A tan cat with black freckles and sharp brown eyes.

Medicine Cats

Fernnose - Brown tom with green eyes.

~*~Thank you for reading! ~*~